

**Christ Community Covenant Church  
Devoted to Prayer – Colossians 4:2-6  
Gloria Merritt - July 26, 2015**

Good morning! Yea! I get another opportunity to bring the morning's message to you and to preach from Colossians, a favorite of mine. If you look at the bulletin this morning, you will see the text, which we will read together in a moment. I've gotten to talk with you before about prayer, but it's been awhile, and it's something close to my heart. But, before I get started, I just wanted to share a little light-hearted video that I found on the internet. I hope you like it, too!

<VIDEO . Kids Pray the Darndest Things>

And, have I told you about my grandbabies? Oh No, I won't do that this time! ☺ Would you please stand and read with me today's text?

**Colossians 4:2-6**

**Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful, and pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.**

This is one powerful little paragraph! It follows the verses that zero in on the relationships that we have in life, the things of life that Dave reminded us to be intentional about last Sunday. This paragraph reminds us that prayer must undergird every one of those relationships. It's the value that undergirds everything we do here at 4Cs, and I hope it's very evident.

[What are you devoted to?]

If someone followed any one of us with a hidden camera, what might that camera reveal about what we as individuals are devoted to? Here Paul tells us to be devoted to prayer, to be watchful in it, to have plenty of evidence of gratitude. Devoted is a pretty strong word . suggesting a love for and a loyal commitment to. My guess is that we still aren't as devoted to prayer as we might think. We can be very inconsistent about it and lose our passion for it. This is an area in which we backslide so quickly! The truth is, it's so much easier to fill our time with other stuff!

Today, we're going to take this little paragraph from Colossians and focus on prayer, because it is so foundational to everything we are as followers of Christ. Prayer is the thing that will help us be wise in the way we act toward outsiders, it is the thing that will help us be ready for every opportunity, it will impact our conversations, helping them to be full of grace, and seasoned with salt, so that we know how to answer each person we encounter. Prayer and abiding in God's word are the things that will sustain us in our relationships. Why? Because prayer is our abiding relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, it is the very breath we breathe, our constant conversation and communion with God. I like this description of prayer in John Gill's commentary: *constant prayer is a means of keeping up a spiritual acquaintance and familiarity with God, and of the soul alive in the vigorous exercise of the graces of the Spirit, and of preserving the saints from temptations and sin.*

If you were here last week, you might remember when Dave talked about a Rule of Life . about being proactive and intentional. We're going to apply that today. We will remind ourselves of some Scriptures about praying, we will discuss some of the roadblocks to prayer, and then we will get practical. In fact, let's pray right now.

<Prayer>

In preparing for this message, I came across a scripture that was pretty cool to find. It's

Isaiah 62:6 & 7 and it's here on the screen. . You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.+Remember, we are this Jerusalem . this depiction of His prize, and we are to BOTHER God, and give him no rest. Remember the story of the persistent widow that Jesus told? [**Give God no rest**] Basically, Jesus was implying that nagging or bothering God is a good thing. This is the opposite of how we are taught to function within our own families, isn't it? Kids are taught not to pester their parents, and wives are told not to nag their husbands or their kids, fathers are not supposed to embitter their children, and culturally, we are encouraged to ZIP IT. But, not in prayer. We are encouraged to persist, and wait, and engage and continue, and on and on and on.

Revelation 5:8 tells us that our prayers are incense in heaven. A pleasing aroma to God. It's kind of neat to think that we bring God a wonderful fragrance through our prayers.

But, the fact is, maintaining a vibrant prayer life is easier said than done. Oftentimes, we just give lip service to prayer. Let's talk about some of the roadblocks to our prayer lives.

### **Things that hinder our prayer life.**

**#1 .** I think the number one thing that hinders our prayers is **Satan and his forces**. We really have no idea of the power of spiritual warfare in our lives. While it is very true that our LORD Jesus Christ through his death, burial and resurrection defeated Satan, we are still subject in this life to Satan's harassment. And, he is subtle. His attacks aren't always easy to see. One of his most effective tactics is to lull us to complacency, to lull us to spiritual sleepiness, to tempt us towards prayer-less-ness, and that's because he understands, and we forget, how powerful prayer is! Satan loves to distract us with more toys, more ease and convenience, and more comforts than we possibly need. I am a living testimony to this!

Let's remind ourselves of Ephesians 6:12: For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.+ Then in verse 18 and 19 it says, and pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.+ Paul goes on to say, Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel + Very similar words to what Paul states in Colossians 4. Are you taking seriously the role that you all have to pray for your spiritual leaders and for missionaries who are out on the field?

Prayer is our opportunity to declare war on the powers of darkness. Yesterday, Gary and I went to the Voice of the Martyrs conference over at Faith Bible Chapel. We just went for half the day, and others from 4Cs were there, too. Maybe more of you that I didn't see! We heard heart-wrenching stories about what is going on around the world in the persecuted church. We heard miraculous stories . some of them from a minister named Brother John+from Syria. God is doing powerful things in that country. He said that the churches are overflowing, that Moslems are coming to Christ. He reported that radical Isis fighters are coming to Christ. He had us all stand and shout out our prayers at that moment for some people who were in the midst of persecution right then. He reminded us that it is a dangerous thing to be a Christian in Syria, and Christian parents must tell their children that it is possible that men will burst into their homes with swords, that men will say awful things and ask them to deny Jesus, that there may be blood, and that they might be killed. The mother says, they must not answer, but be quiet, and that it will only be a quick moment and they will see Jesus. These people fast and pray because their lives are at stake, and Brother John asked us to pray for them, too. The darkness and evil is great, but God is greater. We were encouraged by these testimonies, these stories of bold evangelism. He said that they do not pray and share the gospel out of fear, but out of great love for the One who loves them so deeply, giving His love, and they want others to know this love, too. These people are pretty serious about prayer.

We pray fervently in emergency rooms and in intensive care units and in hospital waiting rooms, because we MUST! But, the urgency is required in so many situations, because souls hang in the balance!

**#2** . A second hindrance to prayer is **An Illusion of CONTROL**. We Westerners really are independent and self-sufficient. After all, we have the internet to help us with any situation in life and we feel pretty smart. We take credit for the good things in our lives and spend the bulk of our lives trying to control. Of course, we pray well when we have bad news about our kids, or we lose our jobs, or we get a bad diagnosis from the doctor. But, one thing is for sure, because we are God's children that he so desperately loves, the LORD will blow-up this illusion of control and show us that we aren't in charge! Things will come that drive us to our knees, and if life is so good that you're not motivated to be on your knees, then I hope you are there in humble gratitude and praying hard for others!

**#3** – A third deterrent to our prayers is **unconfessed or indwelling sin**. We know that overall our Sin is forgiven, atoned for, but so many times we allow our guilt and our shame to keep us from coming to God in prayer. The greater sin is that we would allow it to keep us from fellowship with our Lord.

**#4** – A fourth hindrance is that **we grow bored and impatient in prayer**. If you're anything like me, there are things in your life that you have prayed long years or long months or long weeks for. Waiting can be difficult. It's difficult for me! Just ask my husband. Sometimes, I've had enough of waiting, and I want to get going and MAKE things happen! Then I have to remember these heroes of the faith:

- Noah waited over 100 years, enduring rejection and ridicule for his promise to come to pass.
- Abraham and Sarah waited 25 years for the promise of a son to be born to them . they waited while they watched their aging bodies become increasingly less capable
- Joseph waited 13 years for his promise to come to pass, enduring betrayal and disappointment

**In our impatience, we get discouraged about praying because of unanswered prayers.** What happens when we've prayed years for a loved one to be healed, and they die instead? What if a child prays and prays for his parents' marriage, and they break up anyway? The reality is that these situations can be devastating to our faith if we don't have an adequate view of God and of what He is trying to do in the world. It goes back to that illusion of control. We forget to see things from God's perspective.

Psalm 27:14 . Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord.

Psalm 37:7 . Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him.

Psalm 130:5-6 . I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in His word I do hope. My soul waits for the LORD, more than those who watch for the morning, yes, more than those who watch for the morning.

When waiting for an answer to prayer, ask God to help you see things from a higher perspective.

We can also grow bored with praying. In some areas, I feel like I have ADD . and you know that means Attention Deficit Disorder . I love to have change and variety, and I believe God knows that as He created me. But, in my ADDness, I've also found that if I function within a structure then I don't grow so bored. The military knows that routine and structure is the greatest road to success, which is summed up in Boot Camp! That's why this next point is crucial for me, and maybe it is for you, too.

**#5** . Because, a fifth hindrance to our prayers is that we don't have a plan when it comes to praying. **We aren't proactive or intentional about praying**. And, we don't know how to pray or what to pray. We haven't set it as an appointment in our day with a place for meeting God.

And, here I want to give some grace to moms and dads of young kids. I remember those times when I would be determined to get up early and pray before the kids got up, and it seemed like they would get up even earlier on those days. If I set the alarm for 6:30, they awoke at 6:15! Or if I set it for 6:00, they got up at 5:55. Setting a meeting time with God for prayer can look different depending on our stage of life!

But, here's the deal. Here's where that Rule of Life comes in . not a legalistic, rigid set of rules, but a PLAN, an intentionality, a proactive course for getting after the discipline of prayer. And, the marvelous, amazing thing about it is that the more we practice it, the better we get at it.

I know that love preached on this subject before. It's near and dear to my heart. The truth is, I think I will struggle to be consistent with prayer for the rest of my life. Sometimes it's going well, other times, not so well. I need to be refreshed in this . and I'm preaching to ME! I belong to two different groups of women who are devoted to prayer. It's my hope that their devotion to prayer rubs off on me! One of those groups has recently read a book that encouraged the use of what is called the Daily Offices. [The Daily offices =] means setting [official times of prayer+] It grew from the Jewish practice of reciting prayers at set times of the day. In Acts 3:1, we are told that Peter and John went to the temple to pray for the afternoon prayers. Psalm 119:164 %Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws.+ Anglican and Roman Catholic practices have names for these 7 times throughout the day. If you watch the show %Call the Midwife+, you'll notice that the nuns go to prayer at those times. Another way to look at this number 7 is figuratively . meaning to turn our attention to God throughout the day. This practice has been passed down through the centuries, but sometimes, Protestants have abandoned its rich practice and heritage.

The fact is, without some help, we can grow dry in prayer and easily lose interest and passion for it. These daily offices are a great way to help us begin and maintain the discipline of prayer. Now, I don't want you to freak out here . stay with me! I know that 7 times a day is waaaaay more than what many of us can even imagine doing. But, what about this . have you ever had a wonderful time of devotion and quiet time in the morning, or even in the evening, and then realize that you haven't thought about God the rest of the day? Or, maybe you fall right back into some sinful habit within minutes of that time with the Lord. Can I get an %amen?+ I'm finding that by using the offices . even for 5 . 10 minutes, maybe 1, 2, or 3 times a day, I'm much more likely to stay in fellowship with God throughout the day. It has been wonderful for me. In fact, love printed up one for each of you to have and I'd like to ask the ushers to pass these out at this time. <USHERS>

To be completely honest with you, I'm building on it as I go . working hard towards 1 - 2 times a day, and sometimes I use a different one at a different time of the day. In fact, if you like to use your smartphone to remind you of things, I encourage you to set appointments to pray, which love also started doing. Even if I'm spending 1-2 minutes communing with God during that time, I am growing in the practice of prayer and in the practice of depending on the Lord throughout my day. Of course, things will come up to pre-empt us, but if we get intentional as Dave encouraged us to do last week, we're much more likely to do it. [We will reflect Christ and be more like Him.] We will all find ourselves sitting much more often at the feet of Jesus and, by the miraculous transforming power of God, we will begin to reflect Him and be more like Him. It will be less about our effort and more about Him. This Rule of Life will become His amazing grace in our lives and we will see growth!

The last time I spoke about prayer, I encouraged the use of the A.C.T.S. format . starting with adoration, then moving to confession, then on to thanksgiving, and lastly supplication, which is still a great practice. I also encourage you to concentrate on something different each day of the week: family, church, government, the persecuted church, missions, etc. These areas can be incorporated even with the daily offices.

What I hope will be helpful is for us to practice one of these daily offices right now. We're going to do it together. Pastor Dave is going to lead us. We have printed a little guide for each of you to have

to take home and keep with you throughout the day so that you can begin this ancient and holy practice. It is a guide that utilizes scripture readings and silence. It is my prayer that you are encouraged by this practice and will see that God indeed wants to strengthen your walk with Him by coming to Him in prayer.

Dave, will you lead us, please? <see attached insert>

**BENEDICTION:** A long time ago and far away, Jesus prayed for US. For US. This is what he said, in John chapter 17: %pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.+ May you find greater and greater intimacy with our Lord and Savior, through this incredible gift of prayer!

### Questions for small groups:

1. In Isaiah 62:6-7, we are encouraged to "give God no rest" until Jerusalem is the praise of the earth. Have you ever pestered God in prayer? What was the occasion? If not, why?
2. Do you feel that you personally are devoted to prayer? Do you see evidence that 4Cs is devoted to prayer? Do you see anything that you are more devoted to than prayer?
3. Gloria mentioned several hindrances to prayer: Satan and his forces, an illusion of control, unconfessed or indwelling sin, boredom or impatience in prayer, not having an intentional plan for prayer. Have you experienced any of these hindrances in your prayer life? Any others you can think of?
4. When thinking of the persecuted church and her need for prayer and miraculous provision, we can look at Acts 16:16-34. What points can we glean from this story?
5. Do you have any testimonies to share about your prayer life that might be helpful to others in the group? Any scriptures? Might you enjoy the use of the Daily Offices?