

**"A Family Affair – Praying" – Colossians 4:2-4**

Let's turn to Colossians chapter 4; I'd like to draw your attention this evening to verses 2, 3 and 4. As we are getting to the very end of the book, we are now coming to a place where Paul is going to bring great application, and the application is how to once again live in the power of the Holy Spirit. And we have been looking concerning relationships as we took a look at chapter 3;18, all the way down through chapter 4:1, that the wives were to submit to their husbands; husbands were to love their wives as Christ loved the church. We found that teenagers and children were to honor their parents and obey. And we found that parents were not to provoke their children, and fathers were not to provoke them. And then finally we saw that servants were to serve their masters with singleness of heart. And then the masters were to be very careful how they used their authority because there was a master over their life. And so we have looked at those verses concerning the importance of a life of relationship inside the family. Well, Paul now wants to go outside, and the way that Paul goes outside of our lives is through the life of prayer. And he is teaching the ability to look to God, and touch God, and to minister to the life of others. Now there are two things that stand out most definitely in the life of Paul the apostle; two important ingredients, what made him great. And one of the two things that we probably are lacking in our life, and why we desire to be great and probably never will be in the eyes of the Lord. The first thing we find in Paul's life is he was humble, tremendously humble. And the Bible declares that he wanted to speak, as Christ would have him speak. Well, this was the man that God gave a revelation to, and though God gave him a tremendous revelation there in the Arabian Desert, it was once again the ability for him not to trust in his own flesh. And the second thing that really came across in my own life as I looked at Paul is that he was not seeking to get out of prison, but he was seeking for God to open the doors, that opportunity would be able to open the doors of the hearts of the people around

him. And I find that when I get into a situation or a trial, I just want to get out of it. I don't really care about anything else except myself. Get me out of this horrible mess. Kind of like Jonah, where you spend three days trying to figure it out yourself and finally at the end of three days you're willing to cry out to God. But it's taking seaweed wrapped around your head and the juices of that whale beginning to die your skin and just the humidity unbelievable, but finally he was willing to go to the city, but not with a good heart.

So we find that Paul now begins to share the importance of the life of prayer. It says in verse two, "**Continue in prayer and watch in the same with thanksgiving.**" (Colossians 4:2) So, underline the word 'continue' and then underline the word 'watch' and then underline the word 'thanksgiving'. So, continue in prayer, watch in prayer and be thankful in prayer "**withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance...**" (Colossians 4:3) And so you see the humility that he was willing to acknowledge that he needed prayer. So, "**...that God open unto us the door of utterance [that we might be able to speak], to speak the mystery of Christ...**" [How God put the Gentiles and Jews together] "**...for which I am also in bonds.**" (Colossians 4:3) In other words, he was bound. And you remember in Philippians, he said, "by these bonds many of the brethren have waxed more confident seeing what I'm going through. And many of the brethren there in Caesar's palace begin to come to know Christ." (Philippians 1:13, 14) And then verse 4, "**that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.**"

I was reading the other day and came across this story. A bus driver, we'll call his name Wendell and a minister, we'll call his name Steve, were standing in line to get into heaven. The bus driver approached the gate and St. Peter said, "Welcome, I understand you were a bus driver. Since I'm in charge of housing, I believe I have found the perfect place for you. See that mansion over on the hilltop? Wendell, it's yours." The minister heard this and began to stand a little bit taller. He said to himself,

"If the bus driver got that place like that, just think what I'm going to get." To the minister approached the gate and said to St. Peter, "This is Steve." "Welcome, I understand that you're a minister." "I am." "See that shack in the valley?" St. Peter had hardly gotten the words out of his mouth when I declared, "I was a minister. I preached the gospel. I helped teach people about God. Why does the bus driver get a mansion and I get a shack?" Sadly, St. Peter responded, "Well, it seems like when you preached people fell asleep, but when Wendell drove everyone was praying." And if you've ever driven with Wendell, that is so true. I almost speak in tongues when I drive with him. He's frightening to drive with. And so the importance of just understanding the life of prayer. Billy Graham said, "There is no doubt that we, our people are in serious trouble today. We are caught up in the stream of history that is beyond our ability to control. If there was ever a time, we need to be on our knees in prayer asking God to save us, it is right now." R.A. Torrey declared, "If we are too busy to pray, we are too busy to have power. We have a great deal of activity, but we accomplish very little. We have many services, but very few converts. We have much machinery, but very few results. Prayer is the key that unlocks the storehouse of God's infinite grace and power. All that God is, and all that God has is at our disposal."

And you remember that in Isaiah, in chapter 59, it declares, **"And he saw that there was no man and wondered that there was no intercessor..."** there in Isaiah 59:16. God was looking for a man. God was looking for a woman that would stand in the gap, who had a heart to really pray, who really would take God at His word that would simply lift up the needs of others; that would find the time to fellowship with the almighty God. And God is seeking that today, but as He looks around He can find no one. Dwight L. Moody, when he heard this he said, "I'll be your man." He was only about 15 years old and he accepted the call. He said, "If that's all that God wants is for me to pray, then God, You can stop looking, I am your man." And Dwight L. Moody shook both continents with the power of the gospel of Christ. And so God is looking in Isaiah 63:5, **"And I looked and there was none to help. And I wondered that**

**there was none to uphold..."** [those who were hurting]. In Isaiah 64:7: **"And there is none that calleth upon the name that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee, for hast hid thy face from us, and hast been consumed us, because of our iniquities."** And then the one we know so well, in Ezekiel 22:30, **"And I sought for a man among them that should make up the hedge and stand in the gap before me for the land that I should not destroy it, but I found none."** And then the tragic verse in verse 31, therefore, I brought judgment.

And so, God is looking for men and women who are willing to stand in the gap and listen to God in a very powerful way. But the problem is, is one of the great sins of the Bible, is prayerlessness; that inability to hang out with the Lord, to just fellowship with God; that ability to be able to see God in the midst of your business to ponder God in the midst of your busy life, to allow the consciousness of God to be all over your life all the time. We have somehow, because I think we're Gentiles, have the ability to separate a time with God and then a time with us. And God wants us to have sweet fellowship with Him no matter what we're going through. And that if we would cry into Him, He would help us in just a wonderful way. And so the Bible declares that we are to pray and not to faint. It also declares that we are to pray without ceasing. It says also, pray always with all power. And then he declares, praying in the Holy Ghost. And so you say, "Well, does that mean that I close my eyes on the freeway?" I hope not. "Does that mean that you can pray when you're putting on makeup?" I think you can. Ask God to help you see those areas that you need to not see. I mean, you can ask God to do anything, and we have not because we ask not. So we have become a people that are very independent of God and we often run to God when we are in dire need. But that's really not what prayer is all about. It is really Paul ministering about the new man having a new communication in his life. It is about a man and a woman who have been born by the spirit of the living God, who have come into a fellowship that is so rich that all they can do is talk about Jesus Christ. And so they find themselves singing, and making a hymn within their heart. They find themselves like

the Bible declares that they that loved the Lord spoke often of Him. They find that when all of a sudden they are watching television they begin to think about the Lord and they turn off the television, begin to get excited about the fellowship that God wants. They understand what it means to have God hold you, and to caress you, and to kiss the lips, and to be in fellowship with the Lord and to feel the sweetness, and the goodness, and the grace of the love of God, but what a tragic thing when we go weeks without fellowshiping. We begin to shrivel up, and we begin to get an attitude. We lose the joy and we go after the things of the flesh, because the vehicle that God has given is the church to reach the world, but the fuel is prayer. And if I'm not placing the fuel into the instrument, then it's going to hurt people. Peter rose up, you remember, and grabbed the sword and took a whack, and took an ear off the servant of the high priest. And Jesus had to pick it up and heal Peter, and said to Peter, "You know, Peter put away the sword." You see, that was a man seeking to do something for God, but not being a man who was under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And so men and women today are doing things outside of the anointing of Christ or without the touch of the almighty God and so it's not supernatural, it becomes a natural thing. So, we run the church in a natural way. So we have leadership, and boards, and we do things like the corporate world and the thing is dead. And God said it needs to be alive and He desires to govern it, but if I don't hang out with Him, if I don't see Him, then things are really going to mess up. We have a little cordless speaker for our television and every once in a while it gets messed up because we push the wrong button. And so we have to get out of bed and begin to move it until it becomes green and when it becomes green then we have a good connection. And I believe that's what prayer is all about. Somehow in our life we kind of mess things up because we have to do them and all of the sudden we have red, red, red, red, and we run into this wall, and we run into that wall, and everything is stopping, and we can't figure out why God isn't working in our life. But if we would stop and get in the Word, and refocus our life upon Christ, and find that green light then we would find the way to go. And we would hear the voice of

God saying, "Walk in this way. You being in the way, I will lead you." And so, once again, God desires.

So, there are two things I want to look at before we close tonight. First of all, is the nature of prayer in verse 2, and secondly is the need of prayer in verses 3 and 4. And so the nature of prayer in verse 2, **"Continue in prayer, watch in the same with thanksgiving."** Let me give you three things under the nature of prayer, three important qualities of prayer. Number one: A dedication to prayer, a dedication to prayer. Notice it goes on to say you must continue in prayer. Now the word in the Greek is a word that means to persist. It also means to give attention to, or to keep on. It means to discipline or to be disciplined. It means to concentrate or be steadfast. Now this is important because our type of praying oftentimes is, "Lord, can I have this car in Jesus' name?" or, "Lord, give me that blonde and I'll serve You for the rest of my life." or, "God, help me loose weight." or, "God, do something for me. Lord, grow hair in my head, I mean, do something profoundly in my life and I'll serve You for the rest of my life." But that's not what prayer really is. In other words, if you're going to do anything right in your life, then you need to, with all your heart, work on the consistency of daily fellowshiping with God. It means that you and God have a date every day. David said, "Seven times a day that I seek the Lord." It means, like Daniel, three times a day that he turned towards heaven. And even when he was accused, the Bible declares that once again he continued as he did aforetime. In other words, nothing changed his life. There was a pattern there was a consistency; so when his whole life fell apart he was not going to change. And the so the word 'consistency' means to continue something on a regular basis. It becomes as important as you dressing every single day, or you and I eating every single day and so it means, once again, of the knocking, the consistency. We know the story so well of the widow who was knocking on the unjust judge's door. And finally because she wouldn't go away he got up and answered the door and what God is seeking to teach us is that there needs to be a consistency. Lord, I bring this before you. God, I give this to you. Lord, I want

this to be done. God, You do what You want to do within my life. In Romans 12:12 it says, **"Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer."** In other words, hang on; do it all the time. In 1 Thessalonians 5:17 it declares **"Pray without ceasing,"** all the time. And then in Acts 2:42, after the baptism of the Holy Spirit, **"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine."** So it means that there is a craving, or a cleaving to it. Not just hit and miss, but there is something that is greater than that. And Paul is saying that if you're going to have great relationships in life, you're going have to have this consistency in a life of prayer. And Spurgeon declared that he would rather teach men how to pray than how to preach. And the reason why is because if you can pray, you can preach. But until you can pray, you really can do nothing else. And so many of the pulpits in the world are filled with preachers right out of Genesis 1:1: **"without form and void"** because they have not gone to God and asked God to change their lives and to bring it forth freshly; and so the importance really of a dedication. Am I dedicated? I mean, it's hard enough being dedicated to the Lord, amen? Now you're at missing dedicated to prayer. Well, if you would dedicate your life to prayer, then the rest of all the dedications in your life would be very simple. If you would dedicate your life to hearing God, and knowing God, and seeing God, then you would be able to rise in absolute confidence in any board meeting around the world. You could stand before the President of the United States and speak with authority because you have spoken to God, you can speak before anybody. And that's where we lose the confidence. We lose the confidence and the insecurity of our lives because we have not connected with God and we are worried about what men are thinking about us. But once you connect with God, no one else will ever be that important again. And if you can say it to God, you can say it to the devil or you can say it to the world, or you can say it to Hitler face to face. In other words, nothing will stop you from being that man or that woman that God desires, so a dedication.

Secondly, also under the nature of prayer, I find the second is also a discipline in prayer. Not only a dedication, but secondly the nature of prayer is a dedication, a

discipline in prayer. It says here, we must watch in prayer. And the word means mental alertness. It means to be vigilant. It means to be alert. It means to be aware. Now this is important because sometimes our wives are going through difficult times and we just blow it off. Now God opened your eyes to see it. Have you prayed for them? Or sometimes you see your children beginning to get a little weird, more weird than normal. And God is showing you that. Have you gone to prayer for them? Or maybe God has shown you something in the church where people are not as loving like they used to? Instead of criticizing, are you aware in an instant and ready to pray for God to do a work; in other words, being alert. In other words, when I'm alert and I see what God's doing, like the children of Issachar, they were able to keep rank because they understood the time and the seasons. Well let me tell you that Satan knows every move that you make. He is a roaring lion seeking to destroy your life. He is very alert to your life. And if he's alert, I want to be alert because I don't want to fall in sin. I don't want to be sucked into something that is not pleasing to God. I want to do what God wants me to do. So, am I mentally alert in the life of prayer? You're saying to me tonight, "Steve, I don't even pray, let alone be consistent and now you're telling me to have a mind and a mindset that is absolutely governed by the Spirit of God." It means to be sensitive, to be tender to the voice and the heart of God. Where you see something, or you hear something in your own mind that's not pleasing to God, instantly you take it to God and you bind the works of the enemy and you bring all things under the subjection of the Holy Spirit. And you use the operation of the Holy Spirit as an umpire within your life. "Get that out of my life. No, I don't want this. Yes I want this." And so it means a mental alertness. So we don't have time to be depressed. We don't have time to feel sorry for our self because we are too busy praying and we're too busy watching. And all the way through the Bible it tells us that we are to watch and pray that we enter not into temptation. Ephesians 6:18, **"praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit watching thereunto with perseverance and supplication for all saints."** And then in I Peter 4:7, **"But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer"**

and so I'm to pray watching, looking, speaking about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So first of all, I'm to dedicate my life to prayer. That is the nature of prayer. Second, is I am to discipline myself in the life of prayer, to start looking, be open and thirdly, I find that I am to delight in prayer. And notice it goes on to say, "to be thankful", in other words, to be grateful. And you know the one story of Jesus healing the ten lepers and all of a sudden one came back to say "thanks." And Jesus said, "Were there not ten? Where are the nine?" And because he went back, Jesus said that you are now whole. We don't know what happened to the other nine, but they were healed, but I don't think they were made whole. I think the wholeness of a life comes when you are really thankful. You're thankful for the things that God is doing; thankful for the kingdom of God, for Jesus Christ, and for the relationships He's given to you. And sure you can see that the rose has thorns or you can see that God placed a beautiful rose upon a thorn. You have two ways to look at life, and all of a sudden you begin to understand something about what Paul is saying, that the nature of prayer, the very heart; the depth of prayer is that I need to dedicate my life to this God Who I love. And boy, if I love Him, I want to talk to Him. If I love my wife, I want to spend time with her. And not only do I want to spend time, but I want to discipline myself to listen. I want to discipline myself to see what God wants me to... don't go there, don't do this, don't sign that contract, and don't say that at eleven o'clock at night to your wife, wait 'til the morning. Boy, we don't learn very quickly. And then lastly, I want to learn to delight, to be thankful, and that's the nature of prayer.

Let me share with you quickly what is the need of prayer. Notice in verse 3 and 4 he said, very simply, "with all praying." See, I think Paul was from the South, **"withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ for which I am also in bonds."** So the first thing I see in verse 3 is the need, just the need of prayer. Notice he goes on to say that I'm in

prison. He was now in prison in Rome. He is seeking for God to open doors, not open prison doors, not to get him out. In other words, he understood that where God had him is where he wanted to stay. He was content, but what he was not content about is he wanted God to open the hearts of the soldiers. He wanted God to open the heart of Caesar, Nero. He wanted God to open the heart of Agrippa and Felix. In other words, this was a great man who was willing to die for himself. And in verse 2 I see that that type of praying really is for myself, but here it becomes intercession. So, pray for me that God might use me. And the way that God is going to use me is to open the door. You remember the Bible says, "He opened the heart of Lydia." And then in Matthew it says that He opened the tomb. And so, God has the ability to open that, which is locked. And so you're walking around thinking God will never open that house, or God will never open this marriage, or God will never open this single relationship. God will never do these things. God is in the business of opening, but He's also in the business of closing. The book of Revelation tells us in chapter 3:7 that He opens and shuts and what He shuts no man can open. I wish I could learn that. I mean I just keep running into a wall, bloody and messed up, and breaking my way through, and God says, "Well, Steve, that's a wall. The door is right next to it. Go my way." But not me, I have to show God I can endure this incredible pain. I mean, how stupid can you get? So, I have come to a place that there are only two types of people: Either you're like Habakkuk or you're like Jonah. Either you're going to go through, "Well School 101", or you going to go the "high tower" and pray, but you're go to pray and you're going to go through it one way or the other. Now you have to make a choice of how you're going to learn this lesson. If you're stubborn, you want to be like Jonah? No problem. And Jonah, you remember, wanted to die. He said, "Throw me over." He had no idea the fish was there. He would rather die than go to Nineveh. And so they threw him over. I imagine Jonah as he was going over thought, "Man, it would be better to die than to go to Nineveh." And what was waiting for him: God. What a bummer. The fish opened his mouth and swallowed him, and there he sat on the tongue of that fish pouting, bummed, mad, cursing. I mean, just angry with seaweed...

I wish I could draw a picture of the seaweed and throw-up and all of the fish, and guts and everything, and he's just sitting there mad. Like some of us at home and it's three days before we even come to our senses, and it's like we're mad at God. Well, how crazy can you get? I mean is that going to move God? Who are you punishing? You see God is not going to move. When Jonah was thrown up on the shore, what did Jonah say? "Where do you want me to go?" What did God say? "Go to Nineveh." What did God say in the very beginning? "Go to Nineveh." Did God change his mind? No. No matter what you do, you're not going to change God's mind. So you have to make a choice if you're going to go through "Well Seminary" or you're going to go through the "High Tower Seminary". And I want to go up and dance and say, "Lord! Man, I don't see how it's going to happen, but I know in my heart that, God, You can fill the barns, and You can do a work and You can minister by the power of Your Holy Spirit."

And so I find that Paul needed prayer and this is so important. "God, get me out of this situation, or God, do this in my life, or God, do that in my life." How about, "Lord, You have placed me here. Would You open doors for me to minister?" Maybe He's put you in a difficult place, or maybe you have put yourself in a financial burden. Maybe God wants you to minister where you are. Learn the lessons and begin to help other people. Maybe you've lost a loved one. We've been unfortunate to have so many of our loved ones go to be with the Lord, but God is teaching you how to love people and how to be a blessing to other people. And so the need, once again, the door of deliverance, the door of opportunity. And you remember that He shut the door to Asia to Paul. Paul said, "I want to go to Asia," and the Holy Spirit said, "No." And it was to Europe that God wanted him to go and so God opened the door to Europe.

And then, secondly, I find the need to speak. Notice this, "That I may make it manifest as I ought to speak." And this is the thing that just absolutely, from a pastor's standpoint, blows my mind. This was the most brilliant man probably that ever walked

the face of the earth when it comes to theology. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews, he was of the tribe of Pharisees, he was blameless. As touching the law, he was blameless. He made havoc with the church. He had a zeal that was unbelievable, unmatched. You could stone him at Lystra. He would stand up and go back into Lystra. He went through three shipwrecks and continued to do what God wanted him to do. And God said, "I'm going to show you, Paul, all the things you're going to suffer for my namesake." And Paul was faithful to the very end. And God took him out into the desert, and thereby the revelation of the Holy Spirit, not flesh and blood, but by the Spirit of the living God, God taught him. For three years God instructed this man of the mystery of Christ. How that Christ came to break down every wall to take away the separation between the Jew and the Gentile, to show us that we are one in Christ and here was the man that God gave divine revelation and prophetic prophecy to and he was the theologian of the life of that moment. And here was the man saying, "Help me, God, to speak how I should."

Oh, Lord, help us. Help us to humble ourselves before You. No matter how much knowledge you have, or how great our ability is to do things. It's very foolish not to ask God's help. You might build a carburetor and you might understand the capacity to build it, to work on the float and the gaskets, and put the thing back together in your sleep. But when you tear it apart, and though you do it every single day, if you don't ask God to help you with this one, it could be the one that takes you down. You tighten that nut just one too many times and snap it -- overconfidence. God help us that we would always be sensitive. Kevin, though he is great at worship, my prayer for Kevin and I is that we would never stand before you as though it's a piece of cake, that we would every single moment ask God to help us. And though you own a business or though you're a married person, or though you're single, you need to ask God's help. And so the nature of prayer, you need to continue. You need to make it something that is absolutely rigid within your life that this is what you want to do, to talk to God; that they who loved the Lord spoke often to Him. You need to make a date, put it in your

calendar and keep that appointment. We need to discipline our self to open our eyes to the realm of the spirit. We don't fight against flesh and blood but against principalities and spiritual things so when our children begin to go astray or our marriages begin to fall apart, it's not human. It's satanic, seeking to destroy the very thing that God put together, or divisions within a church. Satan is seeking to destroy. God, give me a mind and a heart to pray and intercede that You would hold it together. Then, Lord, help me to be thankful. Lord, You have held my life together. I'm grateful for you. And then the need of prayer, pray for me. Paul said pray for me. I say to you, pray for me, that I would be the pastor and I would be the man that God wants me to be. Paul said, "Pray for me that God would open my mouth and open the testimonies that I would speak the word of God." And then Paul said, "God, help me to be faithful in how I minister your word." Lord, help me to never get confident in who I am.

### **Closing Prayer:**

Well, Father, we thank You for your goodness and for Your strength. For the wonderful things that You can teach us about the life of prayer. How that, Lord, that we can bow our knee before the God of the universe. And that, Lord, we need no appointment. Lord, we can reach up and, Lord, just enjoy fellowship because You already live inside of us. And, Father, we have not because we ask not. How we struggle with anxiety and worry, and how we fret over so many things and yet, Lord, your Bible tells us that, God, we can't change anything. How do we know that the situations we find our self in are not the very things that You have set into our lives? Could they be the winds and the storms and could they turn us around that we would cry out to you? But, God, I pray that we would come to the wells of salvation with joy in our hearts. That You would take this church, these folks, and that You would teach them how to come before You with no problem. That we would be able to say, Lord, we don't need anything. Father, we just want to tell You how much we love You tonight. And God, we say that tonight, we just say, Lord, we love You tonight. And we thank You, Lord,

for Your faithfulness and for Your goodness. God, make this time of prayer a time of communication, that, God, You have made us a new man, that You have placed upon us new clothing, that, God, You have given to us a new speech and that, Lord, that we communicate with heaven. And Father, I pray that You would minister to the hearts of your people, that, God, that you're willing to reason with them; how You want to touch them, how your ear is not deaf that it cannot hear, nor your hand short that it cannot touch. So, Lord, we ask that You would touch us and You would minister to us by the power of your Holy Spirit. Father, while our heads are bowed and our eyes are closed, maybe there are some of you that would say, Steve, I just need to learn how to pray. My habit of prayer is terrible. I desire to make a real commitment to fellowshiping with my God. If you'd like me to pray with you just raise your hand. Oh, keep them up, keep those hands up. Father, You see these hands. Lord, these are sincere hands. These are people that desire to stand in the gap; who desire to have their life changed. So, Holy Spirit, would You show them what they're missing? Would You show them all the blessings You desire to give them? And Father, would You give them the strength to bow their knee, and to look to heaven and say with a humble heart: feed me and fill me, and use me for your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.