

Battle Plan for Prayer: Prayer Targets – Colossians 4:2-4

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We continue our series *Battle Plan for Prayer*, as we answer some basic questions regarding our prayer life. We have looked at Why do we pray – because our God hears our prayers and answers them – because we live in a world in desperate need of Jesus. When do we pray? In 1 Thess. 5:17 Paul tells us to pray without ceasing, developing a mindset and a lifestyle of prayer. Today, we look briefly at how to pray and who to pray for. In Colossians 4 Paul gives us some prayerful direction. Verse 2 answers the question, “How do we pray?” We discover three helpful guidelines in this verse: “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

1. Praying steadfastly means to pray with devotion. The word, “devote” means to “adhere firmly to.” It implies unrelenting persistence and is the opposite of “hit and miss.” It brings back to mind how steadfast the early church was in Acts 2:42: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” In Luke 18:1, Jesus told his “disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and never give up.”

I’ve used a phrase a couple of times this week, and it has kind of stuck with me. I have told a couple of people going through difficult times that I was turning up the volume of my prayers for them, that I would pray loud and long about their particular situation, that my prayers would not fade into the background but would stay to the forefront of my daily activity. Paul is saying something quite simple: Keep praying. Don’t bail. Don’t give up. Be faithful. You may have dry times and days when you don’t know what to say, but keep praying anyway.

To be “devoted” to prayer also means to be “ready at all times.” In Mark 3:9, Jesus told his disciples to get a small boat ready for Him so that the people wouldn’t crush Him. This word “ready” is the same word that is translated, “steadfast” or “devoted” in Colossians 4:2. Paul is saying, “Always be ready to break into prayer, and do it instantaneously, at all times.” That’s precisely the admonition in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 where we’re exhorted to “pray without ceasing.”

President George W. Bush is a good example of this. Because he was already devoted to prayer, he was ready to break out into more prayer when the events of September 11th rocked our country. As we “keep at it” on a daily basis we won’t need an introduction to God when some demand or crisis suddenly comes upon us.

Paul doesn’t leave us with just an exhortation. He also gives a couple tips on how to remain devoted in our praying.

2. Pray with watchfulness. Verse 2 continues by saying that we’re to be “watchful” or awake when we pray. Paul told the believers in 1 Thess. 5:6 to not go asleep but to instead be “alert and self-controlled” as the time approaches for the Lord’s return. This exhortation brings to mind the words of Jesus to His disciples the night before He was crucified in Mark 14:34, 38: “Stay here and keep watch...Watch and pray so that you will

not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.” Watchful prayer provides the spiritual fortitude to face down temptation. Because Peter could not stay awake when he was supposed to pray, he gave in to temptation and denied Christ a few hours later.

Consider the difference between two military sentries. One is guarding the National Guard Armory here in Anoka. The other is guarding a platoon in Tora Bora, Afghanistan. Which one is probably going to be more attentive? Which one will be more watchful? The one who realizes he’s in a battle. Friends, because we’re in a spiritual battle, we need to stay on high alert at all times. 1 Peter 5:8 paints a real picture of the war we are in: “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

3. Pray with thankfulness. We should never pray without thinking of at least one thing to thank God for. Gratitude is a stimulus to prayer. When we see answers to prayer, we will pray more. He’s given us so many things. We can thank Him for His presence, His provision, His pardon, His promises, and for His purposes. Listen to how Paul puts his own preaching into practice in the Book of Colossians 1:3: “We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.”

1:12: “Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.”

2:7: “Rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”

Knowing how we should pray with utter devotion while being watchful and thankful, who, then, should we pray for? If we’re honest, we probably pray for ourselves more than we pray for anyone else. Our next prayer target, after ourselves, is most likely the people closest to us, followed by other friends and relatives.

But who else should we be praying for? God’s Word gives us some other important prayer targets:

Praying for the Lost – In 1 Timothy 2:4, we learn that God wants “all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Even John 3:16, which may be the most recognizable verse from Scripture, proclaims that God’s love motivated Him to send His Son for the salvation of people all over the world. Because of our sin, none of us are righteous, not even one. Yet God’s amazing love sent His Son Jesus to the cross for our sins and raised us up from death and condemnation. If all people mean that much to our God, should they not also be very important to us? Seek out the Zaccheaus’ (Gospel) of your world and circle of influence and invite them into Jesus’ presence.

Praying for Believers – As Christians, we need each other’s prayers. It’s one of the most loving things you could ever do for each other. We shouldn’t just wait for something to happen to a brother or sister in Christ, but be diligent and faithful in praying for them all of the time. Have you ever gone through our picture directory and prayed over pictures and families that you find there?

Acts 2 gives us a picture of the early church and how they were devoted to one another in prayer. They were united in their care and concern for one another. One of the ways we can contribute most effectively to our congregation's unity is through the active practice of praying for each other as believers. It heals us. It bonds us. It unites us.

Praying for Family – Surely by now, you're way past the kind of praying that's content with only asking God to "bless" and "be with" your spouse, children, grandchildren, extended family, and even yourself. We praise God more and see God more clearly when we pray specifically. So begin assembling a plan from the ingredients you've been gathering along the way – a battle plan for engaging in prayer for the people you love. Based on the testimony of Scripture, your investment in prayer on your family's behalf is the leading, most effective use of your influence in their lives. Prayer will help you to know God better while also better knowing each member of your family. They have no better friend or companion in life than a praying husband or wife, parent or grandparent, or whatever wonderful role you've been called to play.

Praying for Authorities – Actions and decisions made by people in authority create a significant impact on those within their sphere of influence – both good and bad. Our authorities either help us in doing the will of God, or they make it harder for us to pursue. The Bible commands us to pray for all those in leadership over us. Paul writes in 1 Timothy 2: "I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way." We should offer prayers for their salvation, for their ability to lead or govern, for their commitment to the highest standards and priorities, both personally and professionally. (Again I direct you to the display – 52 weeks of prayer for America and its leaders and future)

Praying for Laborers in the Harvest – Jesus wants us to lift our eyes and see all the people living around us and in the world, and realize they are hurting, empty, wandering, and searching for purpose and meaning, like sheep desperately needing a Shepherd. Jesus was moved with deep compassion for them. We should be as well. In Luke 9 He commanded us to pray specifically and "earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." Jesus' solution to dealing with overwhelming human needs is prayer – praying for more people to serve in ministry or mission.

What God wants are people devoted to Him. People in love with Him. People whose hearts are ready to be used for reaping the harvest. People whose lives are surrendered to His Word. People who are primed to receive the blessings only He can provide.

So here we stand together at this moment in history, needing God's Spirit and power to rain upon us, to work His perfect will through us, to make us ready for everything He desires us to do in this generation. But, let's not just stand here. Let's kneel here. Let's bend here. And let's see what God will do in our midst, in our homes, in our church, and among the nations. As we press into prayer. As we raise the volume of our prayers. As we

unite in prayer. As we fight in prayer. As we seek Him with all our hearts in prayer. In the name of Jesus. Amen.