

THE HOUSE OF PRAYER

Series: Seeing the Invisible

Colossians 4:2-6

Introduction: During a long and losing baseball game, the restless boys on the little league team began losing interest and focus on the game, and started to question Ritchie, their assistant coach, about his attractive little sister. How old was she? Was she going out with anyone...? Etc.

The head coach heard this chatter and was getting annoyed. Not only were they losing, but now he realized his boys didn't even care about the game. So, he decided to put a stop to it. In his frustration he hollered at the boys: ***'Get your head in the game. In fact, when you're in the dugout, you boys talk only about BASEBALL!'***

There was stunned silence for about two minutes...and then a voice from end of the bench called out, ***'So, Ritchie, does your sister play baseball?'***

Paul has been telling us all throughout Colossians to have the passion and focus on Jesus that makes our lives productive, exciting, & life-changing.

Colossians 2:6 ***"just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, CONTINUE to live in him..."***

Colossians 3:1 ***"Since... you have been raised with Christ, SET YOUR HEARTS on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God..."***

Colossians 3:15 ***"Let the peace of Christ RULE in your hearts..."***

Colossians 3:16 ***"Let the word of Christ DWELL in you richly..."***

Colossians 3:17 ***"And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, DO IT ALL IN THE NAME of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."***

Again, and again, and again, Paul tells us REMEMBER the Lord. He closes this amazing letter to the Colossian church, and to us, with a call to ***faithful prayer, wise witness, and conversations full of grace.***

Colossians 4:2-6 “**Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. 3 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. 4 Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. 5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.**”
[NIV]

This book focuses like a laser beam on the one who created the universe and the one who controls the universe - Jesus Christ. Paul has been laying out the Jesus that Christians believe in and the Jesus that Christians belong to. Paul shows us, in these five verses, how Christians are to behave like the Jesus they believe in and the Jesus they belong to.

I. Be Devoted to Prayer

Paul begins by saying, ‘**Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.**’ (Colossians 4:2, NIV)

I believe that the need of the hour in the world we live in today is prayer. And there's not a problem in your life, in your family, in your finances, in our church, or in our community, that can't be solved through prayer. Why is that? Because **prayer links our helplessness and nothingness with the limitlessness and vastness of God's almighty power.**

STORY: Jim Cymbala, when talking about his ministry at Brooklyn Tabernacle, said, "You know, when I started out, I was so bad. And things were so bad, and the building was dilapidated, and there were just a handful of people there." He said, "The first offering we took up was something like \$86.00. And I'm sitting here thinking I have a wife, and I have a baby coming, and \$86.00 is not going to cut it." He said his sermons were so bad.

If you read the book, "Fresh Wind; Fresh Fire," he talks about getting sick and having to go to Florida because he had some respiratory problems. He needed to be in the sunshine. And he said that on that trip, as he was praying, as he was so discouraged and the Lord spoke to his heart, and said, "Jim, if you will teach the people to pray," He said, "your needs will be

met." He said, "You'll never have a building big enough to house all the people I will bring to you."

Isaiah 56:7, SAYS, "My house shall be called a house of prayer..." As important as preaching is, He didn't say, "My house shall be called a house of preaching." He didn't say, "My house shall be called a house of praise," although praise is critical. He didn't say, "My house shall be called a house of fellowship." He said, "My house shall be called a house of prayer..."

STORY: During the 1970's an informal prayer meeting developed in the White House. High powered leaders and for the most part, Christians, gathered for inspiration and encouragement and the opportunity to pray together. To everyone's surprise, Arthur Burns began to attend. He was the Chairman of the Federal Reserve System, but he was also Jewish.

He was held in such high respect that whenever prayer time came around, they would not call on him to pray. The following week there was a newcomer that led the prayer meeting, and he didn't know who Arthur Burns was and he asked him to lead in the closing prayer. The regulars began to look at each other and wonder what would happen, but Burns immediately reached out to join hands with those around him, and he prayed (what many said later) was the most memorable prayer of all.

Here is what he prayed. **'Lord, I pray that you would bring Jews to know Jesus Christ. I pray that you would bring Muslims to know Jesus Christ. Finally, Lord, I pray that you would bring Christians to know Jesus Christ. Amen.'**

I am not sure what Mr. Burns meant totally, but I do believe there is difference between people who claim to be Christians and people who truly know Jesus Christ. **People who truly believe in Jesus, and belong to Jesus, will behave like Jesus.**

The word **'devote'** is a compound word made up of a word that means to 'be steadfast' or 'endure' with a preposition that puts that word on steroids. It literally means **'to hold fast and not let go.'**

Paul said prayer is not just something you say occasionally. It is not just saying a blessing over a meal or a 'Now I lay me down to sleep...' before I go to bed. **Prayer is more than an act that you do occasionally. It is an attitude that you live in continuously.**

The same idea is communicated in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 where Paul says we are to ***pray without ceasing***.

In Jeremiah 13 God says, ***"As the belt clings to the waist of the man so I made the whole household of Israel and the whole household of Judah to cling to me"*** God's people are designed to CLING to the Lord - prayer is the primary means of doing that.

Prayer is not just a 911 number in case of an emergency. Devoting yourself to prayer is an imperative; not a request. This is a requirement; not a recommendation. This is a command that means from the time that we get up in the morning until the time we go to bed, we should always be in an attitude of prayer looking for opportunities to pray about everything.

A. **To be DILIGENT in prayer you MUST be INTENTIONAL.**

1. Start Each Day in Prayer

Mark 1:35 (NIV) ***'Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.'***

In the Bible many godly men and women rose early to meet with God.

- Abraham (Genesis 19:27)
- Job (Job 1:5)
- Jacob (Genesis 28:18)
- Moses (Exodus 34:4)
- Hannah and Elkanah (1 Samuel 1:19)
- David (Psalms 5:3; 57:7-8)

Jesus said, ***"Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added"***.

2. Have a Regular Place to Pray in the Morning -

- Mk 6:26... He departed to a Mountain to pray.
- MT 14:23... He went up into a Mountain to pray
- LK 9:29 ...Went up into a Mountain to pray.
- JN 8:1...Jesus went to the Mount of Olives
- LK 22:39... And he came out and proceeded as was His custom to the Mt.

of Olives

Within that Mountain there was a special Garden that he would go to....
'The Garden of Gethsemane.' It is no surprise that when Jesus faced the greatest trial of His life, He went to same place he had gone to some many times before.

If you develop the regular practice of meeting with God under normal circumstances, he will not seem like a stranger when you face the inevitable trials of life.

3. Have a Plan for Prayer

Have a prayer list for family members, church, etc.

4. Develop Prayer as the FIRST Reaction to Everything

- When you lose a loved one you pray, you lose your keys you pray.
- When you get cancer - pray, you get annoyed - pray.
- When you are confused pray, when you gain understanding pray.

B. To be Diligent in Prayer remember the Purpose

1. The purpose of prayer is to draw you near to God.

If everything in your life were just roses all the time, you would not draw near to God because you wouldn't see your need for God.

That's exactly what the Bible says in Deuteronomy chapter 8. As Moses is talking to the people, he says this: ***"Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."***

2. Secondly, the purpose of prayer is to ask for His will to be done.

Jesus taught us to pray, ***"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy***

name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

First John chapter 5, verses 14 and 15, ***"This is the confidence which we have before Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him."***

KEY TAKE-AWAY: Prayer is NOT to be a last resort; it is to be our first response.

Four Insights to Encourage us in PRAYER.

A. **God wants us to be FAITHFUL in prayer.**

Prayer is something that we are commanded to do and that we are privileged to do - to call upon the God of the universe. Prayer is a paradox. On one side it's easy to pray, because a little child can pray. You don't have to go to seminary to know how to pray, but it's also difficult.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones of the 1900s, had this quote: ***"Everything we do in the Christian life is easier than prayer."*** This is a guy who walked with God and studied the Word of God. **Why is prayer so easy but also so hard?**

Because there is power in prayer. And because there's power in prayer, the devil will fight you to keep you from praying. Your flesh will fight you to keep you from praying. How many have this experience: You go to pray, and you're in prayer for ten seconds and your mind wanders to something else?

Or, you come before the Lord, and you think 'I must have been on my knees for 30 minutes.' And you look, and it's been three minutes. The devil will fight you. Your mind will wander, and your phone will ding, and other things will be calling you. All that is because there's power in prayer.

Jeremiah 33, verse 3, ***"Call to Me," the LORD says, "and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know."***

When we pray, we can connect with God's power, and He promises to answer when we pray.

Jesus put it this way: ***"Ask and keep asking; knock and keep knocking; seek, and keep seeking, because the one who asks, receives, the one who seeks, finds, and the one who knocks finds an open door."***

Psalms 27, verses 13 and 14. David said, ***"I would have despaired unless I had believed I would see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; Be strong and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for the LORD."***

B. **God wants us to be WATCHFUL in prayer.**
"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful."

When Jesus told the disciples, ***"Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation; the Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak..."*** He wasn't saying take a seat and watch...you're out of the game and on the bench. It means you're still in the game, and you're watching.

This word is a picture of a sentry in an army. His job is to walk around the perimeter of the camp at night listening for every sound, watching every movement, and being mentally and spiritually alert.

What Paul is saying is to be watchful for opportunities to pray. Do you have a difficult boss you have to work for? That is an opportunity to pray for him or her. That difficult relative you are dealing with? That is an opportunity to pray for him or her.

I've learned that if you start your day with prayer, it sets the tone for the day. You may not be an early morning person, but you do get up sometime in the morning. I would encourage you when you do, begin it with prayer.

Just like an orchestra tunes its instruments before a concert or a carpenter sharpens his tools before he starts working, or an artist mixes his colors before he paints, that is exactly what prayer does for us.

So, from the time you get up until you go to bed, live a life of prayer. Who is it right now that you need to begin to pray for and quit griping about? Gossiping about? Complaining about? Moaning about? PRAY!

The same word is used in 1 Thessalonians 5:6-7 (ESV) ***"So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. 7 For***

those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night."

So, the watchfulness we are called to is contrasted to the absent-mindedness of being drunk. Why does one get drunk? To forget, so that they will not be focused on the cares of life. Paul says - the alertness you are called to is the opposite of that. You aren't trying to forget the issues of life - you are taking them to the only one who can do anything about them.

Remember Nehemiah's dilemma, in chapter 4 it says, ***"we made our prayer to our God, and because of them (enemy) we set a watch against them day and night."*** They were watching and praying. They were alert as they worked and prayed.

The idea is we are being **WATCHFUL** in prayer with the assumption that God is willing and able to bring about a positive response to our prayer.

Martin Luther said, "Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance. It is laying hold of His willingness."

Remember that prayer is talking to the God of the universe, the God who spoke the worlds into existence. That's how we keep alert and awake and vigilant as we pray.

God invites us to... ***"Come boldly before the throne of grace, that you may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."***

The Bible says of the sons of Issachar were ***"...men who understood the times and what Israel should do..."*** We need to be aware of what's going on in our world.

c. **God wants us to be GRATEFUL in prayer.**

"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful."

He says we are to be **WATCHFUL** in heart attitude of thanksgiving.

Hebrews 13:5 says: ***"Through Him then (speaking of Jesus), through Him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God; that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name."***

Thanksgiving always marks the believer's prayer life.

How grateful are you in your prayers?

Now, thankful praying gives evidence of genuine faith in God. Even when things are tough, when you can thank God, that shows that you trust God.

There was song that was popular some years ago,

"When you're up against a struggle that shatters all your dreams, and your hopes have been cruelly crushed by Satan's manifested schemes. When you feel the urge within you to submit to earthly fear, don't let the faith you're standing in seem to disappear."

What do you do? You praise the Lord. ***"Through Him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God; that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name."***

Thankful praying shows that you really trust God. Three things that every Christian needs to know and have firmly established in their hearts:

Number one: ***God is good.***

Number two: ***God loves me. His lovingkindness is everlasting.***

Number three: Romans 8:28, ***"God works all things together for good to those who love Him, to those who are called according to His purpose."***

When you understand, and you know deep down in your heart, no matter what happens in life, God is good, God loves me, and God is going to work this together for good, you can and should continually give thanks to Him.

The other thing about thankfulness in prayer is it drives out anxiety and worry. Philippians chapter 4, ***"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." "And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."***

D. ***God wants us to be PURPOSEFUL in prayer.***

Paul is writing this letter from prison in Rome. This is his first Roman imprisonment, as he writes to the Colossians. Paul piggybacks what he just

said to the church about being people of prayer and then he tells them how to pray for him. **“3And 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.** (Colossians 4:3 NIV)

We have asked people many times to pray for us to be healed of a sickness or to find a job, or to bless our children, or to make a wise decision, but how many times have you ever asked people to pray that God would open a door for you to present the Gospel? To talk about Jesus?

I have heard so many times people say, ‘The way I witness is I just try to live the best Christian life I can.’ The problem is they are not saved by your life; they need to hear that Christ died for them, came back for them, loves them, and wants to live in them.

Show Youtube Video “Alistair Begg the man on the middle cross” 3:28

Paul says, "Hey, pray for me." He's in prison. He's not saying, "Pray for me that the prison doors would open," like they did in Philippi, Acts chapter 16. He said, "Pray that a door of opportunity would be opened to me, so that I could speak forth the mystery of Christ for which I have been imprisoned."

ILLUSTRATION: If we placed a resume in 5 places, and 4 of them don't call us back, but one does, - we say, "God has opened a door for me". Right? But that is never how Paul uses that phrase.

Open Doors are NEVER Easy Doors. Every time this phrase "open door" is used in scripture it is speaking of an open door for the Gospel to be proclaimed and believed.

Acts 14:27, ***And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.***

Just so you know that open door involved Paul being stoned and left for dead. Would you call that an open door? Paul did! Because people came to hear and believe the Gospel.

1 Corinthians 16:8-9, ***But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, 9 for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.***

There he says were many adversaries - that is an understatement. Ephesus was one of the roughest cities Paul ever preached in! A CITY WIDE riot occurred - or as Paul calls it, "an open door"! Why does he call it an open door - because some heard and believed the Gospel.

II. Speak the Gospel with Clarity

Paul was the perfect missionary. His life was the convergence of three streams of culture. Roman, Jewish and Greek - he was extremely intelligent. Not only that he was remarkably successful. Yet Paul said,

3 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.

4 Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

Sharing the Gospel clearly to me is easy, but I'm called to make it clear to YOU. The Gospel MUST be clear to who you are speaking to if it is to bring about conversion.

Gospel clarity comes through prayer. It doesn't hurt to study the culture, get to know the person, but there is no substitute to prayer.

To be clear, I don't believe we ought to be busting doors down and be insensitive to people. We need to be discerning where they are in their life, and we need to walk through the doors that God opens.

It is just as important in what you say in as how you say it. You don't have to be rude or pushy to be effective. You don't have to intimidate to communicate. Share the Gospel clearly, and passionately.

ILLUS: A little girl was on the way home from church, turned to her mother and said, "Mommy, the Preacher's sermon this morning confused me."

The mother said, 'Oh! Why is that?'

The girl replied, "Well, he said that God is bigger than we are. Is that true?"

"Yes, that's true," the mother replied.

"He also said that God lives within us. Is that true too?"

Again, the mother replied, 'Yes.'

"Well," said the girl. **"If God is bigger than us and He lives in us, wouldn't**

He show through?"

And just so you know, Paul, in the epistle we know as Philippians, which was written **after Colossians**, closes out that book and says, **"All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household,"**

Paul was chained to a Roman guard; one on this side, one on this side in house arrest, chained to a Roman guard. Can you imagine you're an unbeliever, and you're chained to the apostle Paul? Guess what you're going to hear? You're going to hear about Jesus. Your whole shift, you're going to hear about Jesus. And he must have led some of those guys to Christ. **"All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household."**

Devote yourselves to prayer, speak the gospel with clarity, and...

III. Live Wisely

"5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."

STORY: In 1939, Adolph Hitler and the Third Reich were marching across Europe in their vicious campaign to take over the world. In the years to follow things would only get worse, embroiling the entire globe in World War II. However, at the same time in Dallas, TX, there was another man who was starting his own campaign. Jim Rayburn was a seminary student and part-time youth pastor. He was frustrated that hardly any teenagers were coming to church. His campaign was to go outside the walls of the church and meet kids where they were: at school, at sporting events, at soda shops, and on street corners. He would leave seminary on Friday, spend the weekend trying to get to know kids, and then on Monday nights, he would gather as many kids as he could to come to a meeting in someone's home. This became quite an effective way to reach teenagers, and he saw many come to Christ. Jim would return to his dorm room late Monday nights and tell his dorm buddies about what happened. They would spend hours praying and rejoicing in what God was doing. While Adolph Hitler's campaign failed miserably, Jim Rayburn's flourished into what is now the global mission called Young Life.

Paul mentions two things -

a. How you Walk

b. How you Talk

You are to walk with wisdom, and you are to talk with wisdom.

There are a lot of good definitions for wisdom, but one definition is being able to make a good decision in the areas where scripture has not spoken.

When you do what the scriptures tell you to do that is obedience - but when you discern the right path where the scriptures haven't given clear direction is wisdom.

90% of life's most important decisions are in the arena of wisdom.

- You aren't told who to marry - you are given some advice and told to make a wise decision.

- You aren't told which job to take - you are given some parameters and told to make a wise decision.

- You are told kids are a blessing - but you aren't told when to have them, how many to have, etc. it requires wisdom.

Here Paul says walk in wisdom toward outsiders - outsiders is a general term that Paul uses to speak of those who are not, "In Christ" they are not in the family. Paul says, "be wise how you walk before them".

NOW - WHAT IS THE OPPOSITE OF WISDOM? Foolishness - Paul is reminding us to walk in wisdom toward outsiders because of our tendency to be foolish.

Interestingly, the first and only aspect of our walk he directly addresses is our speech –

“6Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”

There is nothing that does more damage to the progress of the gospel than a believer's foolish speech.

Consider your walk - the way you live - unbelievers are watching.

Consider your talk - the words of your mouth - unbelievers are listening.

Consider your social media posts - unbelievers are reading.

The next time you are tempted to say something unwise, post something unwise or do something unwise - Ask yourself is it worth giving a lost person one slight nudge toward hell?

CONCLUSION –

Paul's entire focus in this passage is not just about other people in general. It is about other people who do not know Christ. It is about people who are on the outside looking in, people who are in the dark who need light, people who are dead who need life, people who are drowning in guilt, who need to be rescued by grace.

There is no impact without contact. You should always be walking towards someone that is outside the faith. Now, he says we must be wise in the way we do it. There is an old cliché from the Boy Scout movement in which three scouts report that they helped an old lady across the road. The scout master said, 'Why did it take three of you?' They said, 'Because she didn't want to go!'

When you don't act, when you don't take the opportunity then you are haunted by THE question, 'What if?'

In fact, two social psychologists from Cornell University did some research and they found that time is a key factor in what we regret. Over the short term, we regret our actions, but over the long haul we regret our inactions. When people get toward the end of their life and look back, inaction regrets outnumber action regrets eighty-four to sixteen percent.

Illustration: Charles Spurgeon who was lying on his deathbed and he said this, 'If I have any message to give from my own bed of sickness it would be this - if you do not wish to be full of regrets when you are obliged to lie still, work while you can. If you desire to make a sickbed as soft as it can be, do not stuff it with the mournful reflection that you wasted time while you were in health and strength... Overcome the wicked one and fight for the Lord while you can. You will never regret having done all that lies in you for our blessed Lord and Master. Put as much as you can into every day and postpone no work until tomorrow. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.'