

Colossians 4:2-4

The Truth is Out There: The Discipline of Prayer

I have noticed over the years that space exploration is dominated by the search for life on other planets. One of the primary means of this work is in SETI (“Search for Extra Terrestrial Intelligence”). Whether or not such seeking will result in anything fundamental is beyond me, but the fervor in which we look fascinates me. It is strange that, even as we slide deeper into the abyss of secularism, we do not look to the skies for answers less, but more.

Next to Scripture, nothing shapes one’s spiritual health more than prayer. “The sinning man will stop praying,” the old saying goes, but “the praying man will stop sinning.” Like any relationship, communication clear sign of health or sickness. If a husband and wife barely talk to each other, their marriage is at risk. So too, if we do not talk to God, our relationship suffers.

Scripture teaches us that **Prayer is an Expectation of the Christian**. Although it should be unnecessary to say, Christians pray. Often this is an assumption. In Matthew 6:5-9, Jesus used the phrase “when you pray.” Not “if,” but when (see also Luke 6:12; 18:1). It is the natural function of the believer to converse with their Savior. This was the practice of the first Christians (see Colossians 4:2, Acts 1:14; Acts 6:4; Romans 12:12; Acts 10:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17). Christians pray out of delight, not duty. Just as a husband might look forward to time with his wife, so too, the Christian should enjoy time with their God. Martin Luther once commented that “As it is the business of tailors to make clothes and of cobblers to mend shoes, so it is the business of Christians to prayer.”

Secondly, **Prayer Welcomes Specificity**. No doubt we have all prayed the Miss America prayer, “Dear God, bring world peace.” Although adequate in one sense, we should strive to be more specific. Imagine talking in such generalities with your spouse. When we share with one another, we are specific. We share specific needs, specific concerns, specific fears, specific joys, and specific moments. Pray for that couple in the other office at work who are going through a divorce or that mother who just lost her child. Be grateful for your children and how you see the Lord working in their lives or what a blessing your spouse is. Luther once commented on his puppy who was sitting near the table with his mouth open hoping food would drop to the floor. “Oh, if I could only pray the way this dog watches the meat! All his thoughts are concentrated on the piece of meat. Otherwise, he has no thought, wish or hope.”

Thirdly, **Prayer is an Act of Intercession.** We should reject any suggestion that prayer isn't "doing something." It is intercession on behalf of others. A simple way to evaluate the health of your prayer life is to evaluate if your prayers are dominated by personal needs or the needs of others. Intercession is a key ministry of every believer. To neglect prayer and intercession is inexcusable. Would you not want others to pray for you? Then why not pray for others?

Finally, **Prayer is a Gospel Ministry.** Paul rarely asked for temporal release in his letters. Rather, he wanted the church to pray for his effectiveness in ministry. He cared more about the spread of the gospel than anything else. It makes one wonder that if we prayed for the spread of the gospel in our community as much as we prayed for personal needs or asked others to pray for the spread of the gospel in our community over our personal needs, what do you think would happen?

Conversion is a miraculous work of God. That means it takes prayer. Paul wants every step of his ministry to be saturated with prayer. In fact, we could say that for Paul, every convert and every church planted was another prayer warrior for the Kingdom of God. Is that not a radically different attitude than what we have today?

So how is your prayer life? I doubt any of us have arrived at the ideal prayer life or reached the heights of a Daniel, a David, a Moses, a Paul, or even a George Müller. Certainly, we all can improve. Prayer is a discipline that is best learned by doing and by conversing with God, we will reap incredible benefits.

In the mid-nineteenth century, a young man living in Canada wrote a poem for his mother who was living in their hometown in Ireland. It would go on to become a staple in many churches.

What a friend we have in Jesus
All our sins and griefs to bear
And what a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer

Oh, what peace we often forfeit
Oh, what needless pain we bear
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer