

I don't know if people who go on holidays more often, solve this problem, or whether they just have the problem more often, but one of the most stressful times for Robyn and I, is not "being" on holidays, but "going" on holidays...

We look forward, all year, to the break we're going to have. And before we go away, we've got to plan and organise:

- *preachers for when I'm away;*
- *people to set up church;*
- *people to lead worship*
- *play music;*
- *teach Bush Kids Sunday School;*

And then there's remembering what you're going to take on holidays...

- *push bike;*
- *helmet, gloves, shoes, pump...*
- *Robyn – Scrap-book stuff;*
- *supply of books*
- *bucket of sunburn cream*
- *etc, etc...*

And I don't know why, but every time we go on holidays, the morning that we leave, stress runs high, and Robyn gets cranky (although, if you ask her, she'll tell you that I get cranky...

Why would we be cranky? We're going heading off on holidays...

The problem is, we lose perspective. We focus on the immediate demands, and we lose perspective of the joy we're entering into...

Now, over the last few weeks, we've been talking about 'taking off self', and 'putting on Christ'... What it's been about, is not only "wishful thinking", and it's not only a possibility, but it's a **reality** of living a transformed life, because Christ has taken up residence in our heart...

And sometimes, we might get so focused on the 'day-to-day', and doing the right thing, and maintaining the right behaviour, we lose perspective of why this transformation exists in the first place – our relationship with Christ.

Having an intimate relationship with Christ, isn't only evidenced by a change in attitude, and a change in behaviour – our intimate relationship with Christ flourishes in prayer...

Now, when it comes to "prayer", some folk have a real gift of intercession – they have a spiritual gift of prayer. And they pray and pray and pray, and their prayers always hit the spot.. I don't have that gift, but I am very aware, that prayer in my life (as in every Christian's life) is critical...

Even for me, as a pastor of a church, sometimes my focus gets so much on what I'm doing, and what needs to be done, prayer gets forgotten... How stupid am I???

Apparently, when Martin Luther was asked by a friend, what his plans were for the following day, he replied,

"Work, work from early until late.

In fact, I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer"

That to me, sounds like a Christian who had his relationship with God in perspective... The relationship is critical.

e.g.

When it comes to being married, I can keep the car mechanically sound; the lawn mown and the hedges trimmed,, but I'm pretty sure Robyn would prefer a husband who talks to her...

And we get that, don't we – a married couple need to communicate (to maintain a healthy relationship). How much more, should we (as disciples of Jesus), be a people who pray?

Righto, today, Paul gives us 4 instructions on “prayer”.

1.

Firstly, ² **Continue steadfastly in prayer.**

In the Greek, the meaning is *busy oneself with; be busily engaged in; be devoted to prayer*...

In other words, “Make prayer a priority”; “Don't stop praying”. It's sorta like what he says in 1Thessalonians 5:17 (2nd shortest verse in the bible) “**Pray without ceasing**, (in the Greek, it is a tie for the shortest [2 words] – pray ceaselessly)...”

You know, some folk talk about “the power of prayer”, as if the reason for us to pray, **is to get more power...** But as disciples of Jesus, I don't think “gettin' power” is supposed to be the motivator for prayer... The motivator for prayer,

should be our love for The Lord, and the **power** of prayer, comes as a benefit, of having an intimate, communicative relationship with The Lord.

2.

Secondly, being watchful in prayer.

When we pray, what are we watchful about? Well, I'm going to give you 3 aspects of watchfulness:

a)

Watch to see what is going on in the world around you.

- Notice what's happening in the world;
- Care about what's happening in the world; and
- pray about what's happening in the world.

Notice what's happening in:

- your own family;
- your local community;
- the state;
- our nation;
- world

But something that I was taught a few years ago, is to notice when we see God in action... Let me give you a simple example: Jesus said: **“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”** Do you know what that tells me? If a person is showing signs of ‘interest’ in Jesus/Christianity/your faith,, this is the Holy Spirit of God, drawing them (God at work)...

Notice these things. Watch and notice, when God is at work. And immediately pray for that person, and pray about how you can help that person to find Jesus.

b)

Another form of watchfulness, is being watchful for **answers** to prayer... Sometimes I don't think we take enough notice of the prayers that God has answered. Watch and notice the prayers that have been answered. It gives us something to be thankful for, **and** when we see prayers being answered, what does that do for your faith? It just makes it stronger, doesn't it...

c)

But probably the most important form of watchfulness for us (in our prayer-life), is the watchfulness we're continually encouraged to have, in the New Testament — Watching & waiting, for the coming of the Lord Jesus...

It's about standing strong in our faith and being ready for when He returns; **AND** having our hearts and our minds focused on eternal spiritual things rather than temporary earthly things... It's about having our minds focused on our Heavenly Father's business, rather than things of the world...

And so, when we're focused and watchful for the coming of Christ, our whole prayer-life will be transformed. The things we pray for, will be different...

Think of the prayer Jesus taught His disciples:

Matthew 6:9-13 (ESV)

⁹ Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come,
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,

¹² and forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

It focuses on:

- worship;
- coming Kingdom;
- the will of our Heavenly Father;
- the forgiveness of sins;
- living in holiness;
- divine protection.

In fact, the only earthly request, is for our “daily bread”...
“Just give me what I need, to get by today.”...

And when we’re watchful for the coming of Christ, and mindful of this in our prayers, we’ll be praying for spiritual things, instead of earthly things...

Sadly, a lot of the books on prayer (these days), are all about “how I can get stuff”... (prayer for physical health/stuff). But

when we pray, the Lord wants us to focus, not on physical stuff, but on his plans and his purposes....

And so, be watchful in prayer:

- a) notice what's going on in the world, and pray about these things (and especially notice where God is at work);
- b) watch for answers to prayer, and praise God in thanksgiving; and
- c) be watchful for the return of Jesus, and our prayers will be focused on things of eternal value.

3.

Thirdly, pray with thanksgiving.

You know, we are to watchful and alert when we're praying, but not with fear and anxiety... Faith leaves no room for fear and anxiety.

The old saying is:

Fear knocked at the door; Faith answered; There was no one there...

No matter what's going on in our lives/world, we can pray with thanksgiving.

We give thanks to the Lord, for

- our Lord Jesus Christ;
- love and sacrifice;
- grace and mercy;

- calling – to be His holy saints;

Isn't that enough to be thankful for? Well, there's plenty more.

- for our brothers and sisters in Christ;
- Christians who uphold us in prayer;
- for the gospel going out into this world..

And in all circumstances, we can give Him thanks, because we know that He is in control... Paul knew very well, how to give thanks to the Lord. Even as he wrote this letter, he's chained-up in prison... And yet, he gives thanks.

Colossians 1:3–5 (ESV) ³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.....

Giving thanks in prayer... We have so much to be thankful about, and so let's do that (pray with thanksgiving).

4.

Fourthly, pray for those who are preaching the Gospel.

Paul says, “pray also for us”. You know, sometimes we can fall into the trap of feeling that the ministers; missionaries; pastors; evangelists; church leaders, have got it all covered,

whereas we're the ones who need the prayer... But church leaders, very much need the prayers of the rest of the church. And I am so aware, that I need you to be praying for me. Please pray for Robyn and I, every day.

And there's a few things he specifically asks prayer for.

a)
that God may open to us a door for the word

Imagine that: Paul was chained up (in prison). What sort of door would you be praying to be opened??? Would you pray perhaps, that the door of the prison would be opened so you could walk out? Well, Paul had seen that happen before (Acts 16).

Paul wasn't worried about his life. He'd lost it years ago, when he gave it to Jesus... His prayer, wasn't for his release from prison, but that the door for the **Gospel** would be opened. Paul was always looking for a chance to share the Gospel. In the past, his prison guards had been converted. And can you imagine being confined to a cell, and chained beside the Apostle Paul...

And this, my friends, is how we should pray... And can I ask you, please pray for the ministry of Bush Disciples. Please pray (every day), that the Lord would open doors of opportunities of sharing the word...

b)

But, what is this word that he's asking them to pray that he will be able to share??? **to declare the mystery of Christ**

Something I've always noticed about Paul, is the way he's keen for us to know that preaching the Gospel isn't about:

- skilled salesmanship;
- stringing together clever arguments;
- fine oratory skills;

The role of the preacher is simply **to declare the mystery of Christ**

Now, we talked about this back in Chapter 1: the mystery isn't something we have to figure out (like a puzzle) – It's God's plan of the ages, that gets revealed: **Christ in you, the hope of glory.** – that's the mystery – that Christ would live in us. And because Christ is in us, we know that we will be with Him...

Being a preacher of the Gospel, isn't as difficult as many of us think... It's not about impressive or convincing words – it's about clarity.

You see, if I was a skilled and very good public speaker (I'm not btw), but if we had someone searching for meaning in the congregation today (and we might have – it might be you)... But if I was to give moving stories and pull at the heart-strings, and maybe even give promises of “you'll have a much better life”,,, the person who's seeking, might be moved to a response, but what are they responding to???

Paul asks them to pray, that he would “make it clear” – that he would be able to clearly unveil the mystery – to reveal Christ... Now, if a person responds to a clear revelation of Christ, that’s what God does... And that’s what it’s about...

And I reckon this is just marvellous... One doesn’t have to be an academic to preach Christ... And do you know what I’ve noticed – True conversions that lead to lasting faithfulness, generally have less to do with a high-powered speaker, and more to do with a simple local Christian, who’s willing to clearly share why s/he believes, and why they are so sure of Christ, they stake their life on Him...

And that’s something that any of us can do. And I’m going to ask you to pray for me: that I can clearly declare the Mystery of Christ, so that the Holy Spirit can take that seed, and make faith grow in a person’s life...

And I’m hoping, you’re going to ask somebody else, to pray that prayer for you. This is a prayer that we should be praying for each other: That each of us (within Bush Disciples) could clearly declare the Mystery of Christ, so that the Holy Spirit can take that seed, and make faith grow in a person’s life...

Wouldn’t it be amazing, if in this town and district, we individually, and we together as a church, were being the answer to this prayer: that in the power of the Holy Spirit, we would be declaring “Who Christ is” and “how we experience Him, living in us”...

That'd be cool hey... But I need to warn you: The simple Gospel, is a message that will offend some. It was because Paul was preaching this message, that he landed in prison...

Anyway, this is another message that I've had to split in two. And next week, we're going to learn about "connecting with outsiders"...

Let's pray:

Ah, Heavenly Father,
we want to give you thanks,
that we have so much to be thankful for.

We thank You, for The Lord Jesus Christ.
We thank You,
that You loved the world so much,
that Your Son died on the cross,
to redeem us and make us pure and holy;

We thank You for the relationship You call us to.
We thank You, that You have given us,
this wonderful thing called "Prayer".

Lord, by Your Holy Spirit,
make us a people of prayer.
That we would be busily engaged in prayer.

Help us to be watchful as we pray.

- a) notice what's going on in the world, and pray about these things (and especially notice where God is at work);
- b) watch for answers to prayer, and praise God in thanksgiving; and
- c) be watchful for the return of Jesus, and our prayers will be focused on things of eternal value.

Lord,

We also pray for our church,
and for all the churches in this community.

- open a door for the word;
- that churches would grasp this; and
- declare the mystery of Christ;
- not with fine and fancy words,
- share our experience of Christ in us, and our hope of glory
- with clarity.

And Lord, we pray this, knowing this is a Godly prayer,

Amen.

ⁱ Dunn, J.D.G., 1996. *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: a commentary on the Greek text*, Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press.