

completes the cycle of prayer by acknowledging God's grace and care for us. When we watch, we not only see God's answer to specific prayers, but we focus on what God is doing. The more we view God at work, the more we have to be thankful for.

*Philippians 4:6 NLT - 6 Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.*

*Paul encouraged the Philippians to pray about everything rather than worry. After bringing their needs before God, he encouraged them to thank Him, not just for answers to their prayers, but for all that He has done. You might take a moment in your group now to offer up thanks to God, for all the things He has done.*

## WRAP-UP

Even if it seems to us like God is uninterested in us when we don't see answers to our prayers, the Bible presents to us a God who cares deeply for each and is working in our lives. Even when we don't realize it or see it. So, the counsel Paul would give us when it seems like our prayers are falling flat is "Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart" (Colossians 4:2).

## MEMORY VERSE.

*Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart.*  
- Colossians 4:2 NLT

**PRAYER (20 MIN)** Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life.

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*Challenge - This week as you pray be mindful of the three part rhythm Paul outlined – be persistent, be watchful and be thankful.*

## **“Persistent, Watchful, Thankful, Prayer”**

*Prison Letters- #14*

## INTRODUCTION

This week we come to the conclusion of Paul's letter to the Colossians. Before he shares his final direction and greetings to individuals, he encourages the Colossians to pray. Paul's encouragement to prayer is important to us all. Prayer is a lifetime commitment. But prayer is not always easy. Sometimes we find ourselves wondering if God even hears our prayers when we don't see the answers we would like to see when we would like to see them. But God does hear us, and He is working even when we don't see it, so Paul helps us with a simple instruction- be devoted, alert and thankful.

## Ice Breaker

*Did you have a special prayer, or prayers that you said as a child? Perhaps at mealtime or bedtime?*

## Key Passage

*Colossians 4:2-4 NLT - 2 Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart. 3 Pray for us, too, that God will give us many opportunities to speak about his mysterious plan concerning Christ. That is why I am here in chains. 4 Pray that I will proclaim this message as clearly as I should*

## STUDY QUESTIONS

### 1. Stay persistent in prayer

*Ephesians 6:18 NLT - 18 Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.*

*Matthew 7:7 NLT - 7 "Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you.*

The idea of being persistent in prayer isn't unique to Paul's message to the church at Colossae. He said essentially the same thing to the Ephesians. And Jesus similarly taught us to keep asking, seeking and knocking. In our key passage Paul says to "devote yourselves to prayer." The word used for "devote" (*proskartereō*) means to be steadfast, continuous and to wait. That's a tall order. Maybe you wonder why we need to pray more than once. After all, God knows what we need, and if we ask him once, isn't that enough to convince Him?

*Why do you think that God might want us to be persistent in prayer? Is there a prayer that you have been praying for over a very long time? What do you feel you have learned through praying persistently or how has long term prayer affected you?*

Paul himself was a great example of persistent prayer. Let's compare what he is encouraging the Colossians to do with what he said that he himself was doing in the beginning of his letter below.

*Colossians 1:3, 9a NLT - 3 We always pray for you, and we give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ... 9 So we have not stopped praying for you since we first heard about you.*

It can be difficult to wait for a response to our prayers, but we believe God has good purposes in what He does, even when we don't understand the delay. Jesus did not heal Lazarus when he was sick but delayed for an even greater purpose – Lazarus was resurrected.

## **2. Be watchful for what God is doing**

A second aspect of Paul's instructions on prayer is to be alert (*grēgoreō*). This word means to be vigilant, keep watch and stay awake.

*Paul warns us to be alert and not "spiritually drowsy". What are some things that might divert our attention away from prayer?*

When we pray, sometimes we get our sights fixed on one thing when God has planned something different. It's like the joke about the preacher stranded in a flood. First a canoe came by and offered him a ride, then a motorboat and finally a helicopter. But he turned them all down saying, "The Lord will rescue me." Do you know the punchline? That's right, God sent 2 boats and a helicopter, but the preacher didn't see that it was from God because he was expecting something else.

*Staying watchful means allowing ourselves to consider the unexpected as God's response to our prayers. Can you recall a time when God responded to your prayers in an unexpected way?*

*Colossians 4:3-4 NLT - 3 Pray for us, too, that God will give us many opportunities to speak about his mysterious plan concerning Christ. That is why I am here in chains. 4 Pray that I will proclaim this message as clearly as I should.*

Paul requested specific prayers from the Colossian church. Considering that Paul was in prison, his request may surprise you.

*What did Paul request prayer for? Why do you think he didn't ask for prayers for his release? What does that reveal about Paul's priorities? How do we see those same priorities in the prayers he prayed for the Colossians? ( v 9-11). What did he pray for them and what was his reason for praying this?*

*Colossians 1:9-11a NLT - 9 So we have not stopped praying for you since we first heard about you. We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. 10 Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better. 11 We also pray that you will be strengthened with all his glorious power so you will have all the endurance and patience you need...*

When we bring our needs to God, we should humbly seek His solution, not our own. We should also be aware of what God is doing and align our prayers to His plans and purposes. Don't neglect seeking the things Paul prayed for the Colossians- knowledge of God's will, spiritual wisdom and understanding.

## **3. Make gratitude a priority**

*Colossians 4:2 NLT - 2 Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart*

There is a rhythm to prayer as Paul suggests. First, we intercede or petition, then we watch and finally give thanks. Giving thanks