

Make the Connection

Colossians 4:2-6

We are coming to the closing stages in our study of Colossians. In the past few sessions we have seen how in the early part of chapter 3 that we should set our hearts on heavenly things. Why? Because that's our ultimate destination and that will determine the nature of our relationship with God, one another in the church and our families. In the verses we read this evening Paul makes some final comments about our relationships with one another. If I was looking for a sentence to sum up these verses I'd say this:

When we make the connection with God, we make the connection with others.

2 Be persistent in prayer, and keep alert as you pray, giving thanks to God. 3 At the same time pray also for us, so that God will give us a good opportunity to preach his message about the secret of Christ. For that is why I am now in prison. 4 Pray, then, that I may speak, as I should, in such a way as to make it clear.

These verses are all about our connection with God which of course is prayer. It's a common theme in the latter part of Paul's letters. It's the most obvious encouragement! We are given three things about the character of our connection with God in verse 3. The NIV puts them much more succinctly than the TEV:

2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

Prayer should be:

Devoted

*4342 proskartereo {pros-kar-ter-eh'-o}
from 4314 and 2594; TDNT - 3:618,417; v
AV - continue 4, continue instant 1, continue steadfastly 1,
attend continually 1, give (one's) self continually 1,
wait on 1, wait on continually 1; 10
1) to adhere to one, be his adherent, to be devoted or constant to one
2) to be steadfastly attentive unto, to give unremitting care to a thing
3) to continue all the time in a place
4) to persevere and not to faint
5) to show one's self courageous for*

The Greek word for devoted is *proskartereo* which means in long and short: hang in there! Keep doing it through thick and thin. Whatever else happens, pray. Whatever happens don't let go of God. Why? How many people have we come across who have shipwrecked their faith because they have topped praying. Pray. Pray individually, pray as a church. Nothing works properly or even at all when there is no prayer.

Paul realises this only too well and asks them to pray for him and his ministry in verses 3 and 4. I encourage you as Paul, never let prayer be absent from any ministry you are involved in. The more, the better.

Watchful

Be alert. Prayer is dynamic. It's a conversation with God. Being alert ensures our conversation isn't one-way. The phrase is used in a number of places in different context in the NT but with the same gist.

1 Pet 4:7 The end of all things is near. You must be self-controlled and alert, to be able to pray.

Luke 21:36 Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

Mark 13:3 Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.

Watch. Being alert is all about seeing what God is doing, listening to His voice, seeing where we need to walk in obedience. A key ingredient of our prayer life should always listening, watching, being alert. Give God space to be able to do that. Never be afraid to look and listen and wait for His voice.

Thankful

This is a bit of a theme in Colossians. Also central to our prayer lives is thankfulness. Being alert explores what God is doing, thankfulness recognises what God has done. Here's a few examples of what we looked at in earlier sessions:

2:7 Keep your roots deep in him, build your lives on him, and become stronger in your faith, as you were taught. And be filled with thanksgiving.

3:15 The peace that Christ gives is to guide you in the decisions you make; for it is to this peace that God has called you together in the one body. And be thankful. 16 Christ's message in all its richness must live in your hearts. Teach and instruct one another with all wisdom. Sing psalms, hymns, and sacred songs; sing to God with thanksgiving in your hearts.

So in the discipline of prayer, a third is about us being persistent in prayer, the other two thirds being about looking for what God is doing and what He's done. That's an interesting balance because so often that isn't reflected in our own prayer lives! Look at other exhortations to prayer in the NT and you'll find much the same. It's an important discipline. Take time to meditate on God's word, take time to let the Spirit remind you of what God has done in your lives. Allow God space to speak. That makes prayer so much more constructive.

So prayer is our connection with God. When that's right, everything else will start to become right. In the next couple of verses Paul explores our relationship and attitudes towards others, both believers and unbelievers:

5 Be wise in the way you act toward those who are not believers, making good use of every opportunity you have. 6 Your speech should always be pleasant and interesting, and you should know how to give the right answer to everyone.

Be wise in the way you act toward those who are not believers, making good use of every opportunity you have.

We explored something of this earlier today. So we want people to come to Christ. Then be wise in the way you act towards unbelievers. Head and Shoulders used to have an advert – *you never get a second chance to make a first impression*. Our task as God's people is to bring those that don't know Jesus a living faith. It's true that the Spirit does all the convincing, but what we need to do is to engage them and present them with Good

News in a way that attracts, challenges, answers need, addresses personal situations.

What we have been reminded of much recently is the way in which sometimes our attitudes down the ages have put people off, made them feel rejected by us, made to feel inferior, even ostracised. Jesus did the reverse, He made a bee-line for the marginalised, the ostracised. Make the most of every opportunity.

The truth is, we meet unbelievers on a day-to-day basis. They need Christ. Ask God to present the opportunities to us that we will recognise them. As a church there is so much more we could do in bringing Good News to people – are we making the most of those opportunities – or are we allowing them to slip away because we feel there are higher priorities?

One of the ways in which churches have reversed decline is that they have started to recognise that they have to identify and make the most of opportunities. We have been fortunate at MRBC in the past because people just kind of came here in their youth or as young families. They found Christ. They grew up in the church in Him. As a church, that's changed in recent years. The younger generation is now un-churched. They don't gravitate here – we know that from the thin numbers in the sub 50s. The solution isn't to pray and wait. It's to make the most of every opportunity – and there are lots of opportunities to reach out – God gives us plenty of just the right sort. It depends on our commitment to doing it. It all starts with taking this scripture seriously.

6 Your speech should always be pleasant and interesting, and you should know how to give the right answer to everyone.

Of course if you were a scout or guide you'll always be prepared – not! If we understand that God provides us with opportunities, and He does, then we must be prepared to make the most of them. Communicating the good news, whether we like it or not is all about speech. As I said this morning, we have a way of living and thinking that's radical, life-changing. We need to communicate it. Paul is saying here that we must speak with the right attitude and have the right answer. What's the right answer? The one that's been prepared for. Something that we've not just trained for, although that is good, it's the one we've prayed for about – the person that's been laid on our hearts.

Pray that we may speak to the not-yet Christians that God leads us too with the right answers. What are they? Not necessarily the good answers that we can be trained for, but the right ones the Holy Spirit gives us for the occasions.

This is where communication with God is important. One thing Christians worry about most is someone asking them something they don't think they have the right answer to. We can be trained to give a good answer from scripture and it's probably time we did another training again on that. But there is a good answer and a God answer and sometimes a good answer isn't the right one for an individual.

If we are serious about our mission to speak Jesus to people, then pray that the Spirit will give you the right opportunities and the right words for each occasion – always being someone with the pleasant and interesting speech that draws people to you and to Christ.