



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. (prchurchofchrist.org)

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Colossians 4:2 "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving."

Prayer is an essential link to our faith in God. Prayer is talking to God. All relationships need communication. It's the way that we connect with God. The disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus outlined a simple prayer.

But here, Paul etches three reminders about prayer.

First, be devoted to it. Dedicate yourselves to prayer. We remember the apostles in Acts 6 told the congregation to appoint seven men to take care of the widows so they could devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. Prayer is easy to do and it's easy to put off. Unlike studying the Bible, you don't need paper, pen, books to pray. You don't need to be seated to pray. You can pray anywhere. You can pray all the time. Praying in the car. Praying at work. Praying at school. Praying in public. You don't have to make a show of it, but, like Daniel, it's not bad to let others see and know what you are doing. Yet, prayer is easy to put off. Other things seem to take the place of prayer. We rush around so much, that sweet hour of prayer is most often, just a few quick seconds of prayer.

Most congregations will spend a quarter looking at the subject of prayer. We'll talk about the prayers in the Bible. We'll hand out little reminders of who to pray for. Paul's words here, be devoted to it. Stick to it. There are so many that need prayers. There are so many things to pray for.

Second, keeping alert in it. That's interesting. One wonders why the Holy Spirit led Paul to write that line. Do we tend to day dream during prayers? Do we tend to think about other things during prayers? Do we find ourselves not focusing upon God when we pray? Keep alert in prayer. We tell young drivers to keep alert and don't be distracted by phones and radios. Teachers try to keep students alert in the classrooms. Preachers want a congregation that is alert while they are delivering their sermons. Keep alert in prayer. Remember who you are talking to. Remember respect, reverence and honor as you address God.

What's a good way to keep alert? I'm not sure what Paul had in mind, but I have found shorter more specific prayers work well. Pin point your prayer.

(OVER)

Our prayers do not have to touch every item to please God. This is true even of public prayers. The first prayer in worship and the last prayer in worship do not have to repeat each other.

The first prayer is setting the stage for us to worship God. Focus upon that. The honor of having God in our presence. The value of His word. The importance of following God. The last prayer of worship is sending us out into the world. We need to be safe. We need to be strong. We need to keep the essence of God within us. Thinking about why I am praying will help guide those prayers.

Keep alert. So simple, yet needed back then and needed today.

Third, with an attitude of thanksgiving. Attitude. Attitude is like noses, we all have one. Our attitudes can soar or they can sink the ship. Negative, complaining, "do we have to" spirit, dampens any activity. It kills birthday parties. It can ruin worship. It makes things tense, miserable and unhealthy. Attitude. Yet, the opposite is also true. An attitude that wants to do things brings sunshine, hope and joy to any setting. Friends that want to be together. Grandkids that want to visit grandma. Disciples that want to worship God. Attitude is important. So many of the works of the flesh, found in Galatians, are attitudes. The thing about attitudes is that we choose our attitudes. We can not control the weather or the world around us, but we certainly can control what those things do to us on the inside. My good friend, the late Barbara Johnson, often wrote in her books, "Pain is inevitable, but misery is optional." Attitude.

Paul puts attitude in prayer. Keeping an attitude of thanksgiving. He didn't just say, 'be thankful.' Nor, did he say, 'Remember to thank God.' But, keep an attitude of thanksgiving. Attitude is the dish that contains the food. Our prayers are built around a spirit of thankfulness. We recognize how blessed we are. We are thankful for God. We are thankful that He loves us. We are thankful to be forgiven. We are thankful that He hears us. We are thankful to be numbered among His people. Are you seeing the tone of this. We continue this on and on, and we find ourselves counting our blessings and naming them one by one. We find ourselves asking less and thanking more. We come to understand how much God is in our lives and how dependent we are upon Him.

An attitude of thankfulness. Wouldn't it be awesome to have one prayer on Sunday to be designated a Thanksgiving prayer. Not praying for the sick. Not praying for the preacher to remember. Not praying for growth. But thanking the Lord. Thank Him for us. Thank Him for worship. Thank Him for healthy babies. Thank Him for the journey of senior saints. Thank Him for being patient with us. Thank Him for changing us. Thank Him for not giving up on us. Thank Him for His promises. Thank Him for His word.

An attitude of thankfulness. Is it wrong to ask God for things? No. Be careful what you ask. New cars, fat bank accounts and things like that do not interest God. Spiritual things, such as opportunities to help. New ways to serve. Eyes opened to see Scriptures. A closer walk with Him. Now, you are understanding God and what He wants. World peace? Won't ever happen until people are walking with Him. Sunny days? Sometimes we need rain and storms and even pig pens to bring us back to Him.

Be devoted. Stay alert. Have an attitude of thankfulness. Now, go pray. Those three simple ingredients sets the tone and shapes our prayers. How interesting it is that we need God's help just to talk to Him. We wouldn't know how to do this had it not been God guiding us.

Be devoted. Stay alert. Have an attitude of thankfulness. It doesn't take 13 weeks to figure that out. Got a family? Thank the Lord for them and then pray about each one, one by one. Part of a church? Be thankful for that and then pray for each one, one by one. That'll keep you busy for a while. And guess what? While you are praying, being thankful and be devoted, Satan can't find a way into your heart. Things just work that way when you do things God's way.

Roger Shouse (used by permission)