

Colossians 4:2-6

Praying with Purpose

I spend a lot of my time travelling which is a great privilege but not easy. Just before a trip I took to the **US** the **Lord** encouraged me with these verses on prayer.

I don't know about you but often when the Lord wants something to happen in your life he has ways of making it happen, but often in ways you least expect. One of the things I like to know before I head off on a trip is that all the arrangements for *preaching* and *church appointments* are in place.

As I headed to a mission's conference in **Las Vegas** I had a foreboding feeling that things were not in place the way I wanted. Sure enough I met up with **Andrew Trezona**, our **US Director**, and headed from **Dallas** to **Las Vegas** to discover my worst nightmare, that absolutely nothing was in place. For **Andrew** and me we found *it drove us to pray*. We prayed morning and night, we prayed before appointments we had managed to make and then prayed after the appointments.

However, despite all this prayer I still felt discouraged that things had not come together as we had hoped for. Then whilst in the foyer of this church I noticed some display racks where **books** and **CD's** were displayed for sale. One of the pastors noticed that I was interested and mentioned that since we were visiting missionaries we could take what we wanted.

One of the first books I noticed was one I had read a couple of times before and so grabbed it among a number of other things.

The book is called '**Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire**', by **Jim Cymbala**. It was the first of three books written that are a **chronicle** of the early days of his time at the **Brooklyn Tabernacle**.

With the encouragement of his father in law, initially **Jim and Carole** started pastoring a church in **Newark, New Jersey** and with the help from his own parents they were able to move into their own home.

Then one day **Jim** got a call from his father in law suggesting he also take on the **Brooklyn Tabernacle** that had hit rock-bottom. **Jim relates that the minute he walked into the building he knew there were problems.**

Running two churches meant **Jim** was running a hectic schedule and the time came when **Jim and Carol** had to choose which church they would pastor. They both realised that God was guiding them to take on the **Brooklyn Tabernacle**. What was very interesting was that the **Brooklyn Tabernacle** could not pay them a wage.

The going was incredibly tough as they **served bi-vocationally**. **Jim** struggled in his preaching as the church struggled to make any sort of progress. Eventually the battle became too much for him and he developed a **hacking cough** which became so bad that his father in law invited him to **Florida** for a rest.

One day **Jim** went out on a party fishing boat with around **20-30 tourists**. **Jim** moved to the other end of the boat as the excited tourists put their lines in the water.

Jim began to pray and pour out his heart to God but found he couldn't finish as he was choked up with tears. **Then quickly but forcefully, not with an audible voice, but deep into Jim's spirit God spoke to him.**

If you and your wife will lead my people to pray and call upon my name, you will never lack for something fresh to preach. I will supply all the money that's needed both for the church and for your family, and you will never have a building large enough to contain the crowds I will send in response.

Jim knew he had heard from God and couldn't wait to get home to tell **Carol** and the church. As **Jim** shared with his church he said something that I hope challenges you like it did me.

“From this day on, the prayer meeting will be the barometer of our church. What happens on Tuesday night will be the gauge by which we will judge success or failure because that will be the measure by which God blesses us.”

Their first **Tuesday night's prayer meeting 18 people attended**, but it was the beginning of an amazing journey. The church began to grow from **50-100 to 150 to 200**. They needed another premises and so hired the YWCA building that held **200-300**. They grew to **300 to 400** and then realised they needed a bigger venue. They bought a block of land but realised it was not what God wanted so they sold it for a profit. Then a **1400 seat theatre** came up for sale but they needed to sell **their Atlantic Avenue property**.

A number of churches expressed interest but nothing came of it, which put their purchase of the theatre at risk. **So they started to pray** and out of nowhere a **Kuwaiti businessman** knocked on the church door. **Jim** showed him through the rundown property and miraculously he bought the property for the asking price of **\$95,000**.

Today the Tuesday night prayer meeting runs at 1500 and people line-up hours before it starts. The Brooklyn Tabernacle runs today at around 10,000 and they have started another 20 plus churches.

Jim was asked one day what was the secret to the success of the **Brooklyn Tabernacle**. **He simply replied that there was no method or gimmick, just prayer.**

Paul knew about *prayer* and wrote about it in every one of his **N.T.** letters. **He realised it was absolutely critical to the effectiveness of the church.** It is one area the enemy resists with all his power, because he knows that prayer is vital to the spiritual life of any **church** or **Christian**.

Here in these few verses **Paul** packs in a lot of direction as to how and what we should pray about.

1. Persevere in prayer

The word persevere or continue means; *to be courageously persistent, to hold fast* to prayer. Again **Paul** specifies the critical discipline of prayer for us as Christians.

Sadly for many Christians prayer is something we do, like a soldier in a foxhole. For so many of us the only time we pray is when we are in a tough spot, a foxhole.

We see what **persevering in prayer** can mean in **Genesis 32:22-26**. **Jacob** would not let **God** go until he had blessed him. By the time **God** had finished with **Jacob** he had undergone not only a **name change** but a **character transformation**. So it is no wonder we are exhorted in the N.T. *to pray without ceasing* in **1Thessalonians 5:17-18**.

Then in **Ephesians 6:18-20**; “...*praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the Saints.*”

Part of our problem in today's culture is that we want *instant results; instant answers to our prayer*, but as we know things don't always go that way. We live in a day when lining up at the **bank** or at the **shopping centre** is a hassle. **Sadly much of this mindset is brought into our Christian walk.**

So the problem arises when we pray and **God** doesn't show up according to our agenda and like a little child, we **spit the dummy** and get upset with God. The N.T. church saw *prayer as the number one tool in seeing the church being effective in reaching their community*. In Acts 6:4 we read; "... but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

Persevering in prayer personally is also the main means of *overcoming temptation*. We see this as Jesus rebukes the disciples for sleeping on the job. Matt 26:41, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

The word **watch** means *to be alert sensitive to what is happening especially with what the enemy is doing to draw us away from God.*

2. Passionate in prayer.

Being passionate about anything affects how you view and participate in something. I have seen people who are **passionate about fitness and body building**. They make all sorts of sacrifices to reach their goal. I have learnt recently that the top athletes in the world such as former world champion **Usain Bolt**, train using a resistance parachute behind them attached by various straps to their bodies.

Why would they do this?

Firstly what they do is a passion; it is something they want to excel at.

Secondly the use of such a tool gives them an edge over the competition.

Being passionate about prayer means we are not easily distracted from our hunger for, and desperate need of prayer.

Being passionate about prayer is seeing and understanding the importance and power of prayer as we seek God to be at work **in us** and **through us**. Why? Because we know that nothing of any eternal redemptive value is achieved unless we pray.

Being passionate about prayer means we are willing to develop and exercise the personal discipline that is needed to make it happen. Sadly many churches fail miserably in this discipline of prayer.

3. Plan in prayer, vs 2

This means that we are disciplined about what we are praying about. The word **vigilant** not only means *staying alert, staying awake, but has the idea or thought of staying alert to prayer needs.*

Just lately I have had a number of these **prayer alerts**. A good friend of mine in the **US** use to run a not for profit organisation called **Hands against Hunger**. Unexpectedly he had been feeling unwell and then the doctors discovered he had a cancerous kidney.

I committed to pray regularly for **Larry** and then kept in touch to see how things had worked out. He reported that they had successfully **removed his kidney** and he made a good recovery.

He then started having heart issues, so asked for pray for the Lord to send him to a new **GP**. This new **GP** realised something was wrong with the electrical charge of the heart and was able to prescribe the exact right medication to deal with the problem.

Being vigilant in prayer is not about praying some **vague generalities**, but about crying out to God with a genuineness of heart and spirit for whatever needs our attention in prayer.

I find it is so important that if we are going to plan in prayer we need to write it down. This not only helps us to be **vigilant** in prayer but **effective** in prayer. An excellent book on prayer is *A Praying Life* by **Paul E Miller**.

- (i) *Prayer journal*
- (ii) *Prayer cards*
- (iii) *Prayers notes*

4. Praise in prayer v2

One of the things that happens when you are a foxhole prayer, is that you call out to God in the desperation of your need, and he answers your prayer. But so often **we forget to thank God through our prayer of praise.**

We see this in **Phil 4:6-7** where we are exhorted to; ***“Be anxious about nothing, but by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, make known your requests to God and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus”***

An attitude of gratitude is such an important aspect of our prayer. Sadly we can be like the **lepers** who were wonderfully healed in **Luke 17**. **Ten lepers** cried out for **Jesus** to have mercy on them.

He instructs them to show themselves to the priests. On their way they are miraculously healed, however only one expressed his gratitude to **Jesus**. ***“And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face, at his feet, giving him thanks. And he was a Samaritan.”*** **Luke 17:15-16**

5. Purpose in prayer, vs 3-6

This brings home the vital need for intercessory prayer.

This is critical for example as to how we pray for our **Christmas and Easter outreach**, or how we pray for **our street**, our **neighbours** or **work colleagues**, or how we pray for **family** and **friends**.

So **Paul** gives us a practical list as to what we need to be praying for:

i. Pray for an open door.

This is about praying for opportunities to be a witness wherever the **Lord** has placed us.

On a trip to **the US Andrew Trezona**, our **US Director** and I were working in downtown **Atlanta**. It was a Saturday so we decided to take a few hours off and visit some tourist spots.

Before we left **Andrew** and I prayed that God would give us some open doors for witnessing.

We went to the **Martin Luther King Museum** but had **no opportunity to witness**. From there we headed to the **Coca Cola Museum**. As we entered in we were met by a couple of staff who were checking our tickets.

One of the staff, **Joseph**, spotted my **Impact Africa** jacket and asked me what it was all about. I told him gladly what we did and he indicated that he was from the **DRC** and he had been in the **States** a short while. **Andrew** and I shared with him for nearly **30 minutes**.

After going through what was a giant ad for **Coca Cola**, they make a last gasp effort to lever money out of our grasp in their **souvenir shop**. While I was there a young man named **Lerone** came up to assist me as I splashed out on some very expensive magnets.

Well it wasn't long before we started talking about spiritual things. He shared that he was a **student** and he was trying to improve his lot in life.

So **Andrew** and I were feeling hungry as it was getting up to **3pm** and so went to a restaurant called the **Texas Roadhouse**.

A young lady by the name of Brittani served us. She was good at her job and we started chatting. As we talked we discovered that she had been married only eight months, when her husband was tragically killed in a truck accident. We shared with her and gave her a Challenge newspaper.

We then headed home and needed to get **some fuel** at a station just down the road where we were staying. As we were getting ready to leave, **a woman drove in with her son**, and asked if we would help her by putting some fuel in her car. **Now I wonder if you have ever prayed for an open door, because when you do God can do some amazing things.**

ii. Pray for what to say, v3

I have had times as I have shared with someone, where I have prayed that God would give me the words to share. This is where it is so important to **read books** that help you get started. One of the reasons I wear my **Impact Africa** shirt or jacket is that people get curious and invariably ask questions. The mystery of Christ is illuminating hidden truths from the **O.T.**

A while ago, my **wife** and **2 sons in law** did their first sky dive. I said to a man by the name of **Paul** that they needed counselling and so the story went. I picked up on the fact that he asked me about counselling and so I asked him if he went to church. He responded by saying that he was a Roman Catholic. So we chatted for a while but try as I may I could not get through to him. So I asked the Lord to help me.

I noticed that one of the trainers was off to my side and was meticulously folding his parachute and aligning all the ropes. I said to Paul what a load of rubbish. I would just roll it all up in a ball and stick in the bag. Paul responded by saying I couldn't do that as my life depended on it.

Suddenly the Lord popped into my mind **John 14 verse 6** which I quoted to him. I pointed out to him the importance of this verse. **Jesus** is not just one of the ways but the only way to salvation. Why was this so important? **Well his eternal destiny depended upon it.**

iii. Pray despite your circumstances, v3

Paul never stopped praying even though he was in chains. **In fact he saw his chains as a divine providential working of God to help him to share the gospel.**

Can you imagine **Roman soldiers** starting the morning shift and they read that they are going to be chained to the **Apostle Paul** for the next 12 hours?

Obviously **Paul** was not somebody who would let such a chance go by, and it was clear that this was the way God got the gospel into **Caesar's household**. **Phil 4:22** says this; *"All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household."*

So are you wondering why God has you in the **suburb** you're in or the **street** or the **workplace** you are in? Maybe as you pray God will reveal to you the reason for why **he has put you where you are**. **Such revelation will stop us complaining and start us rejoicing in God.**

This is what I was thinking about when all our arrangements fell over in the States. **God was showing us what it means to continue earnestly in prayer regardless of our circumstances.**

iv. Pray for clarity in what is said, v4

When we are sharing the gospel the danger is that we slip into a lot of **Christian 'jargonise'**. **Just recently we had a story that had the expression redeeming grace in it which we changed to second chances.** Even in ordinary everyday life our culture and turn of phrase can bring a quizzical look to the face of your hearer.

Some time ago I popped into a Puma petrol station to fill up. As I went in the attendant behind the desk was an **Indian gentlemen**, so when he had finished with someone else, he asked me which pump I had used.

I responded by saying number one and the cost was *an arm and a leg*. It seemed to me that he had understood me clearly, but when I paid he asked me what was an arm and a leg. **I think he was concerned his life was at risk.**

What it did show me is that we can be doing the *right thing* in the *wrong way*. Clarity is not only necessary in terms of the **language used**, but also in the **theology that is presented**.

v. *Pray for your witness in your walk, v5*

Paul was always concerned that his walk matched his talk. **Ephesians 5:15** says this; *“see then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise”* The word **circumspectly** in the original has *the meaning of accurately, precisely, with due care.*

It is the thought behind **Psalm 1:1** which says; *“Blessed is the man who walks not in the council of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful.”*

The issue the non-Christian is looking at is the evidence of the changed life.

I have written and edited numerous stories where the person states that they saw the change in their friend, or family or maybe their work colleague.

vi. *Pray for the best use of your time, v5*

The word **redeem** indicates *a fixed, measured or allotted period of time*. We are to pray that God will enable us to use our time wisely for the expansion of the kingdom.

The problem with time is that once it has gone you cannot have it back.

Moses was acutely aware of the importance of time when he wrote in **Psalm 90:12**; *“So teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”*

John Maxwell states; *“Moses had seen a generation squander 40 years in the wilderness. He believed that if leaders could only gain a keen sense of the swift passage of time, and if they would work for something significant, they*

could die with a great sense of satisfaction. Why? Because leaders don't kill time, they execute it.

vii. *Pray for the right attitude towards the lost, v6*

We are to *avoid arrogance* and a *belligerent attitude* towards the unsaved. Critical to all of this is *our speech*. Our speech is to be *marked by grace*.

John McArthur sums this up so well when he *indicates that our speech should be spiritual, wholesome, appropriate for the occasion, kind, sensitive to a person's needs and or situation or circumstances. It is a grace that has purpose in what is spoken; it is complimentary, gentle, truthful and above all loving and thoughtful.*

This sort of speech is not judgmental or aggressive but caring and concerned for the well-being of the person you are speaking to. Speech that is seasoned with salt is speech that sets the example.

Salt is used to *preserve food* indicating that our speech should not be characterised by corruption, but by words of healing and encouragement.

Salt gives *flavour to our food* so our conversation, our words give a divine attractiveness to Christianity.

Salt makes *us thirsty*, so speech seasoned by salt helps the non-Christian to develop a thirst for Christianity.

All of these qualities are predicated on our **personal** and **corporate prayer**.

I find it so significant that when **Jesus** goes into the temple in **Mark 11** and in **verse 15** He chases all the wheelers and dealers out of the temple. Then in **verse 17** He says this; *“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations. But you have made it a den of thieves.”*

Let me ask you a relevant question: Why didn't God call his house a house of *preaching* or a house of *music* or a house of *leadership* or a house of *benevolence* or a house of *fellowship*?

The answer I believe is **that prayer is both fundamental and foundational** to the effectiveness of your church, which is why it is so concerning that churches struggle to develop this critical area of ministry. Now the question this church has to answer is; *how is your prayer life going corporately and personally?*

So to sum up we are to:

- 1. Persevere in Prayer*
- 2. Passionate in prayer*
- 3. Plan in prayer*
- 4. Praise in prayer*
- 5. Purpose in prayer*