

**Devote Yourselves to Prayer**

- I. **Pray that there are opportunities to speak**
- II. **Pray that you speak clearly once the opportunity arises**

My dear friends,

I have just come from the palace of the great King with good news for his people!

Jesus once told a story about a king who was going on vacation. While his servants packed his bags, he called three of his officials to his courtroom and entrusted them with some of his property. He gave to each man according to his ability. The first two men put the king’s money to work and earned more money for the king. The third man grabbed a shovel, dug a hole in the ground and hid the king’s money. When the king returned he praised the two men who had invested his money and gave them more responsibilities and told them, “Come and share in your master’s happiness!” The king wasn’t too happy with the third man. He had him fired, thrown out of the palace and exiled from the kingdom. This story is a picture of God’s kingdom. Our king, Jesus Christ, entrusts us with his Word. And he wants us to “invest” his word so that it gains “interest”.

Our lesson today is from the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Christians living in Colosse. Paul was having some difficulty with the investment side of ministry. He wrote this letter while under house arrest in Rome. The Apostle knew that the Lord Jesus had entrusted him with a generous portion of God’s “money.” How could he invest that Word of God if he couldn’t leave the house? He had friends, Christian brothers, who came and visited him. These men carried Paul’s letters to Christian congregations, such as the one in Colosse. But Paul couldn’t go anywhere. So he enlisted prayer warriors and writing to the sisters and brothers at Colosse said, **“Devote yourselves to prayer.”**

Make a habit of praying. And in your prayers, **“Be watchful.”** Be vigilant in telling your Father in heaven what’s been tugging at your heart and floating around in your brain. And he added, While you’re praying, pray for us, too.” It sounds selfish at first, until we hear what Paul wants them to pray for. **Pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message.** Even though he was under house arrest, he wanted the Christians in Colosse to pray that God would provide specific opportunities for him. For what purpose? **So that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.** Ah, the heart of a missionary and pastor: Paul wanted more opportunities to tell others about Christ, because it was a mystery to them. They had not heard, and so they did not believe and did not have eternal life. They needed to know Christ was their Savior, too.

Like the servants in Jesus’ story, your King has entrusted you and me with the Word of God. Indeed, this is a precious treasure we hold, more valuable than all the stocks and bonds in Warren Buffet’s financial portfolio. God ask that we put his Word to work to gain interest with it. But are we so bold to pray for doors to be opened so that we can put his Word to work? Some of us might be thinking, “I’d rather not. It’s not my thing. Let them come to me.” Are we afraid of what could happen? They could say, “No,” or ask a question we can’t

explain. Maybe we say, "I think so-and-so is beyond saving. Why pray for a door to be opened for me to talk to them?" Jesus doesn't want excuses. He commands us to go.

Maybe you're someone who does pray for opportunities, and by his grace, God opens a door, but we don't walk through it. We get home and kick ourselves and say, "Why didn't I do this or say that?" For your failure to pray, failure to speak up, maybe you're feeling like me, a little bit guilty? And rightly so. I have failed to do what Christ expects of me.

Remember what Peter did after he denied his Lord and Savior? He ran outside and wept bitterly. In humility he looked to his Savior for forgiveness. In sorrow over our sins, we also, in faith look to Christ. We will look to his life. He is the perfect witness. Jesus used every opportunity presented to him. He witnessed to own his people, even though they eventually rejected him. He sat down with a Samaritan woman at a well, even though it was taboo to do so. He stood before the Sanhedrin (the Jewish ruling council), and before Pontius Pilate (the Roman governor), and confessed, "Yes, I am the Christ." My Savior was perfect for me, for you. Thank God. He achieved what God demands of you and me.

When I cannot forgive myself for my failures, I will go to him in Word. There he takes me by my hand and points me to his perfect life of obedience. He points me to his cross, where my failures were nailed to the tree with his body. He leads me to my baptism, and shows me, "Here I washed your sins away. Here I gave you my life which covers over your guilt. I have forgiven you! You can and will forgive yourself!" His life renews me. His death restores me. His resurrection encourages me to get back up, like a father telling his child son who fell off the bicycle, "Get up and try again." Christ's gospel encourages me to pray for opportunities to talk to someone about the things Christ has done for us.

Some doors are harder to open than others. There are a lot of people who have erected walls around their hearts and minds, which is really where all of us were at one time because of our sinful nature. Human beings are naturally opposed to the gospel. That's why we will pray, "O Almighty Lord, break down those walls. Open doors for us."

Most often doors are opened through relationships. Look at Andrew and Philip when Jesus called them to be his disciples. The first thing Andrew did was find his brother Simon Peter. The first thing Philip did was to go and find his buddy Nathanael and tell him, "We have found the Christ!" Even though Nathanael was reluctant at first, he went with Philip who said, "Just come and see who I'm talking about." Nathanael went, because they were friends.

Think about the relationships you have now; with friends, relatives, acquaintances and neighbors. I've included a handout in the bulletin for you this morning to help you identify those people. Take one minute right now to identify those folks and write them on that handout...

Now think about the circumstances some of these folks are in. Is someone ill? Did a loved one recently die? Are they struggling with their marriage? Are they under financial distress? Is a spouse deployed? Are they

divorced? Are they moving? These may be the doors God is opening for you to step in and share the gospel, or at least invite those people to hear the gospel at this congregation in worship and Bible study.

I'm going to give you a minute to pray to God to open a door for you. Secondly, pray that you recognize that door and thirdly, that he give you the courage to walk through it!

Christ's love for us compels us to pray. And so we will. We will devote ourselves to prayer. We will take these handouts home and place our prayer list in our Bibles or on our night stand, we will tape it to our laptop or TV if we have to.

Why are we praying that the Lord give us opportunities? To grow the church? To grow financially? Those aren't there in our mission statement. Our mission is to seek the unchurched, strive for spiritual growth, strengthen one another through Word of God and His Sacraments. Sounds like our purpose in praying for opportunities is **to make disciples of all nations**. And we do that by proclaiming the **mystery of Christ**," as Paul says. Not only do we ask for opportunities to share the gospel, but also that we proclaim the gospel clearly. Paul asked the Colossians to pray that, "I may make the mystery of Christ clear in the way I ought to speak."

I recently read a quote from a man by the name of George Ferch. He is the pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Carmel, Indiana. A newspaper interviewed him because his church takes such an active interest in their community. When asked why, he answered, "Our purpose is to reach out to the souls of Carmel and surrounding communities without diminishing what God's Word says about sin, and not compromising the good news that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven." Very clear, very concise.

Isn't that what God requires of us when we share his Word? We will speak the law clearly to the hardened, unrepentant sinner, and remind them that sin offends God and puts us outside of heaven. We will speak the law clearly to the one who is self confident in his or her own works, and remind them, "Your good works do not add up! They are not enough!" God wants us to speak the gospel clearly to the despairing sinner and point them to Christ and his cross, to see that he has done it all for you!

At first you may be think, "I can't do that! I don't have the training of my pastor. I don't have the knowledge of Scripture that others do!" Those are the lies of Satan which he has whispered in your ears. He labors so hard so that nothing may be done to praise God. If he can convince you to sit on your butt at home and say nothing to anyone about Christ, then he wins. But there's good news. Each of you is a baptized child of God, which means that each of you has a new spirit living in you, and your new spirit always wants to pray for open doors, your new spirit always wants to speak about Christ, and it is always wiling and eager and confident that you will speak clearly.

If you're struggling with this, you're not alone. Pray about it. And today read Psalm 119.97-104 and Proverbs 2 and James 1.5. Pray for wisdom. Pray for understanding, and God promises that he will give those gifts. But if you're willing to pray for something, you will be willing to do something about those prayers. God doesn't just zap wisdom and understanding into our brains. He works through his Word. Be active in the Word of

God. Take advantage of every opportunity to study Gods' Word at home and in this congregation. If there are other opportunities that you would like to see, talk to me or one of the council members about it. Devote yourselves to prayer. Pray for more opportunities. Pray that you may speak clearly as you ought. Because prayer is a powerful tool. Moses once prayed that the LORD wouldn't destroy people of Israel, and he was going to. And the LORD listened. Hannah once prayed for a son when she couldn't have children, and the LORD blessed her with a little boy named Samuel. Elijah once prayed and clouds stopped dropping rain for 3 ½ years. He prayed again and the rain flowed. Elisha prayed little boy who had died, and the LORD raised him from the dead. Jesus prayed for you one time, that the gospel might reach you. And here you are. Does God answer prayer? Does God hear your prayers? Storm the throneroom of God with your requests. Pray for doors to be opened. Pray for the willingness to walk through those doors. Pray that you may speak clearly as you ought. And then act. He will bless it. He promises it. Amen.