

A Call to Pray with Grit and Gratitude

Introduction

- A. Every year, on the first Sunday of the year, we launch what we call the Week of Prayer. This is now our fourth year doing it. It's been great. I encourage you to participate at whatever level you can manage.
 - 1. And with this Week of Prayer, one of the things I like to do to help us dive in head first is preach a sermon on prayer at the outset of the week. So that's what we've got going on here this morning . . .

The Text

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. (Col. 4:2)

From the Weeks of Advent to the Week of Prayer

- A. Having just spent almost a month or so reflecting on the wonders of Advent, Christmas, the incarnation, and the arrival of God in human flesh and history, it seem to me that, in some respects at least, prayer is naturally the next topic for discussion.
 - 1. Prayer is the logical next step, if you will, the dovetailed item of agenda, following on the heels of Christmas grace.
 - a. For, after all, it is particularly because Jesus is Immanuel, God with us, that we can now even begin to entertain the idea of talking with him.
 - i. If God were not here, if God had remained aloof, if God had not shown any interest in our plight, if God had not been pricked in heart with compassion, if he had not come down and drawn near to us in our muck and mess—then prayer would understandably be the last thing on our minds.
- B. It would be rightly understood along the lines of a child writing a letter to Santa Claus.
 - 1. Listen, the communication may be well intended and innocent enough, but it's utter folly at the end of the day. For no such Santa Claus exists, and whatever you may wish for from him, he is not there to answer or provide.
 - a. So if Jesus is not Immanuel, if Christmas is not an historical fact, then prayer is just wishful thinking at best, and utter foolishness at the bottom.
 - b. But if Jesus has come, if God really has torn the roof from the universe and stepped inside, then prayer is the only rational and appropriate thing we should now be concerning ourselves with.

- C. Think of it. Consider whoever your favorite movie star or musician or public figure may be, I don't care if they're dead or alive.
1. Now imagine, I told you they had just opened the door to this school and they're now here inside the building. John Lennon is here. Steph Curry just walked in. Queen Elizabeth snuck in the back there. John Piper strolled in to make sure we're not preaching heresy and that we're all desiring God in appropriate form and fashion.
 2. What would you do?
 - a. Well, of course, you might just pass out from the sheer excitement of it all.
 - b. But, if you managed to keep your bearings, I know what you'd do: you'd run straight over there to talk with them, right? Who in their right mind would just go on with their day and pay the person no attention whatsoever? You'd want to engage with them. You'd want to give them a hug or get an autograph or something. Again, you'd want to talk to them.
 - i. And that's what prayer is. It's talking with the God who, in Jesus, is here.
- D. You know Joey taught last week on [Phil. 2](#) and how Jesus set aside his lofty status and came down after us.
1. Well, this then connects quite well with what Paul will say later in [Phil. 4](#), and he draws the same sort of line I'm drawing here for us now. Paul says there in [vv. 5b-6](#): “⁵ [The Lord is at hand \[or 'near'\];⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.](#)”
 - a. Did you catch the logic there? Because the Lord is at hand—because he “⁶ [did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant . . .](#)” ([Phil. 2:6-7](#)) and came down to be with us—therefore, pray! Talk to him. Engage.
 - i. You don't need to be worried about your life, going on as if you're left alone in your struggles and hardships, no! God is right here. Pour out your heart in prayer!
 - (1) The weeks of Advent lead quite naturally to the Week of Prayer. Do you see?
- E. Now, when I put it like this, perhaps I mistakenly give the impression that prayer is easy.
1. Is it wise? Yes. Is it logical? Sure. Is it the natural progression of things following off of Christmas? Of course.
 2. But is it easy? No way.
 - a. In fact, in my experience, prayer is one of those things that we have a much easier time talking about than actually doing. We like the idea of it well enough. It sounds

nice. But, when we set out to actually do it, it seems hard, confusing, boring, unproductive, etc.

- F. This is why, I think, Paul in our text for this morning gives us two exhortations in particular regarding prayer. He knows it's challenging. And he's here to help.
 - 1. So we'll look at these two exhortations in turn: Exhortation #1: Be Steadfast in Prayer; and Exhortation #2: Be Thankful in Prayer.

Exhortation #1: Be Steadfast in Prayer

The Presupposition behind This Exhortation

- A. So Paul begins there: "Continue steadfastly in prayer . . ."
- B. Now, for each of these exhortations, what we must see straightaway is that they presuppose certain struggles that we'll all inevitably face when it comes to prayer. There are temptations that can derail us and he's pushing back on them with these exhortations.
- C. So in this first instance then, the exhortation to continue steadfastly in prayer presupposes, of course, the inclination we'll have to throw in the towel with it.
 - 1. In other words: Paul has to encourage us to continue because he knows we'll be prone to quit.
 - a. That doesn't sound like anyone here, does it? I'd wager this is all of us in one way or another. "I don't get it. I don't feel it. It's not working." What is it for you?
- D. Whatever the case, regarding this first exhortation we must now ask two very important questions (and we'll ask the same of the second exhortation later as well): (1) What's the Meaning?; and (2) What's the Reason? What does Paul mean by this, and why is he calling us to it?

Question #1: What's the Meaning?

- A. What's translated "continue steadfastly" here in the ESV is a single word in the Greek: *proskartereō*.
 - 1. It means to persist in, to persevere in, to busy oneself with, to be devoted to, to hold fast to . . . something.
 - a. And in this case that something is prayer.
- B. I suppose it's this very idea that's modeled for us in the brother named Epaphras as Paul describes him in Col. 4:12: "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God."
 - 1. Did you hear that? He's "always struggling"—or striving, or fighting—in prayer for you. He's not willing to let up on it. He's persisting.

C. Take inventory of your own life for a moment. What do you persist in? What do you busy yourself with? What are you devoted to? If someone were looking in from the outside at your life this past week, month or year, what would they say?

1. She's busy with her kids. She's always prepping the next meal, shuffling them off to this or that event, attending to their snot noses, and so forth.
2. He's devoted to his pocketbook, he's always checking the markets, planning his next transfer.
3. She's holding fast to her health it would seem. She's counting calories, exercising near the point of obsession, measuring her body fat and things like this.

- a. None of these things are necessarily wrong in and of themselves—it's good to care for your finances, and your kids, and your health, and the like.
- b. But there ought to be a deeper devotion still, a more fundamental commitment that runs underneath everything else we do: and it's this devotion to prayer.

i. I wonder: would anyone look in and say that's what marks your life more than anything else?

(1) Because, you see, that seems to be what the Scriptures are calling us to be committed to more than anything else.

D. Interestingly enough, though I suppose we should expect this, [Col. 4:2](#) is not the only place where this word [proskartereō](#) is used in relation to prayer. In fact, so far as I could see, of the ten occurrences of this word in the Greek NT, precisely half of them have to deal with prayer in one way or another.

1. Think of all the things God could call us rightly to be committed to. It's not insignificant that the Bible places the greatest accent, far and away, on our commitment to prayer.
 - a. So in [Acts 1:14](#), we're told of the early church there in Jerusalem that : "[All these with one accord were devoting \[Gk. proskartereō \] themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.](#)"
 - b. Or in [Acts 2:42](#), similarly we're told that they "[devoted \[Gk. proskartereō \] themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.](#)"
 - c. And in [Acts 6:4](#), when the apostles are trying to delineate their particular priorities as men at the head of the Christian movement, they say this: "[But we will devote \[Gk. proskartereō \] ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.](#)"
 - d. And then later, when Paul is writing to the Christians there in Rome, this is what he enjoins them to in [Rom. 12:12](#): "[Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant \[Gk. proskartereō \] in prayer.](#)"
 - e. And then, of course, we have [Col. 4:2](#).
 - i. But the bottom line in all of this, I think, is this: persistence, steadfastness, commitment and prayer go together.

- (1) Prayer is not something you take up momentarily and drop when it gets inconvenient or uncomfortable.
- (2) You hold to it with everything you have. You hold to it as if your life depends on it. Because, in some sense at least, it really does.

E. And this leads to the reason (or the “why”) Paul would exhort us to such thing . . .

Question #2: What’s the Reason?

A. So I say that Paul exhorts us to continue steadfastly in prayer, to commit to it as if our life depends on it, because in some sense it really does. But what do I mean by that?

1. Well, we can come at this from both a negative and positive direction.

From the Negative

A. To see what I’m referring to in this negative sense, consider with me Paul’s discussion of prayer in [Eph. 6](#). You see here he locates prayer within the context of war—but not just any war, war in a spiritual even cosmic sense.

1. Sometimes we use the word “spiritual” almost as if to refer to something less real: “It’s not physical; it’s not actual; it’s ‘spiritual’.”
2. But when Paul uses it here he’s referring to that which outstrips and even outlasts the physical; that which is, in a sense, more real than whatever you can see, taste, touch, and so forth. This is the war of all wars.

B. So he begins: “¹⁰ [B]e strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm” (Eph. 6:10–13).

1. And he goes on, as you may well know, to list out the bits of this armor that we must put on if we are to stand firm, if we are to make it through this war. And, wouldn’t you know, there at the grand finale of his list, he directs us to prayer.
 - a. Prayer here, though, it seems to me, is not seen so much as a piece of this armor as much as it is seen as that essential activity that must condition and energize the whole lot of it.
 - i. So he says that in all our fighting, if we’re to be effective at all, we must be “praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints . . .” (v. 18).

C. I think one of the reasons we’re so prone to give up on prayer, is we have no idea the kind of war we’re really in.

1. We can't imagine the spiritual dimension involved in this, and so we naively esteem ourselves as sufficient. We don't turn to prayer and reliance on God and Christ, because we don't think we really need him. We think we can handle it.
 - a. And as such we bring our little knives to a gunfight, our nerf guns to a world war.
- D. My son reads Calvin and Hobbes like I did when I was a kid, and in there Calvin talks about his fear that monsters are under his bed and so he keeps his dart gun nearby on the off chance one of these nefarious fellows were to make a go at him.
 1. And so Levi, naturally, wants to do the same thing.
 - a. And, you know, I don't have the heart to tell him: "Bro, if there really is a monster under your bed, a nerf gun just isn't going to cut it. You'd need something like the Ghostbusters have—one of those ray guns or something."
 - i. But in his little world, if a nerf gun properly discharged can make his sisters cry, surely it could take down a monster, right?
- E. And you may laugh, but you know we do the same sort of thing.
 1. We can extrapolate this out to our lives as adults, where we think in mere human categories, and we limit potentialities within the confines of what we know and have experienced.
 - a. And when we do that we step confidently towards a spiritual battle like little boys with Nerf guns. We rely on ourselves—our own wit, ingenuity, power, and prowess. But this is not going to suffice.
 - i. A foam dart isn't going to drop the devil.
 - ii. Oh but Jesus can—he has and he will!
- F. That's why earlier in [Col. 2:12](#), Paul says that at the cross, in Jesus, God "[disarmed the rulers and authorities](#) [note: these are the same words used to describe the powers of darkness in Eph. 6:12] [and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.](#)"
 1. He's already emerged victorious. And we get access to his victory and power through prayer.
 - a. It's like my son with the monsters. As the song goes: "[If there's something strange in your neighborhood, who you gonna call? Ghostbusters.](#)" Why? Because I don't have the resources in and of myself to take this on. I need help from outside. Get them in here.
 - i. Well, that's what prayer is. It's calling on Jesus to come and do for us what only he can.

From the Positive

- A. But positively, and related to this, here's the other side: not only is God the only one who can truly overcome the bad, he's also the only one who can truly provide the good.
- B. As James tells us in [James 1:16-17](#): “¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”
- C. Related to this is what Jesus encouraged his own disciples to previously back in [Luke 11:5-13](#): “⁵ And he said to them, ‘Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, “Friend, lend me three loaves,⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him”;⁷ and he will answer from within, “Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything”?⁸ I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.⁹ And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.¹¹ What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent;¹² or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!’”
1. It's a “how much more” (or a fortiori) line of argumentation Jesus sets us out upon here: “If A, how much more B.”
- D. I think the lesson is plain right? There's really two images he gives us here.
1. In the first case, you have a reluctant self-oriented friend, who doesn't want to help, but finally, after the other persists in his pleadings and shows no sign of letting up, he finally relents and offers aid.
 2. In the second case, you have a father, who though evil by nature, still gives good gifts to his kids.
 3. But in either case, the logic and lesson is the same: if a reluctant friend finally helps because of the man's persistence, if even the sinful father knows how to give good gifts to his kids . . . how much more will God, your heavenly Father—who is not reluctant but ready to help, who is not sinful and twisted but pure and kindhearted—give to you what you need and all that is good?!
- E. In all of this Jesus is attempting to help us see that we should “[always . . . pray and not lose heart](#)” ([Luke 18:1](#)). Because God is a good Father and he loves giving good gifts to his children.
1. And of course the greatest of all gifts and the final proof that can be offered in favor of all this is that God did not even withhold his own Son, but “[gave him up for us all.](#)” “[\[H\]ow will he not also with him \[therefore\] graciously give us all things?](#)” ([Rom. 8:32](#)).
 - a. If he crushed his own Son in your place on the cross, so he could forgive you, receive you, save you, bless you . . . he's not going to go stingy on you now!

F. Therefore, let us “[c]ontinue steadfastly in prayer . . .” (Col. 4:2a). He loves you. He’s here. He’s ready to help.

G. But, of course, this is not all Paul exhorts us to here regarding prayer . . .

Exhortation #2: Be Thankful in Prayer

The Presupposition behind This Exhortation

A. He goes on to say that we must be “watchful in it with thanksgiving” (Col 4:2b).

B. Now, again, I said that each of these exhortations has in the background a certain presupposition.

1. Hence, this call to watch our prayers carefully to make sure we’re actually thankful in them, presupposes quite obviously, I think, the fact that our prayers can so often devolve into mere grumbling and griping.

a. We come to God, not so much with our thanks and praise, but with our list of demands and our open vents of frustration.

b. So often we come to him like a master to a slave, or a boss to an employee, or a disgruntled customer to the customer service desk, right? “Here’s what we need; here’s what’s gone wrong; here’s what needs to be on my desk by the end of the day.”

C. This is surely not what God has intended for prayer. And, therefore, the Apostle Paul pushes back.

1. But here again we must now ask and attempt to answer those two questions: (1) What’s the Meaning of this exhortation?; and (2) What’s the Reason for it? On what basis can he call us to such a thing?

Question #1: What’s the Meaning?

A. What’s translated “being watchful” in the English here is one word again in the Greek: *grēgoreō*.

1. It means to stay awake; to be watchful; to be in constant readiness; to be on the alert.

B. It’s the word used by Jesus in [Matt. 24:43](#) where he’s talking about how the master of the house needs to stay awake, to keep watch, lest a thief come in the night and break into his place.

1. When you lay that image over our text in Colossians the result is interesting isn’t it?

a. We can imagine ourselves staying awake and alert in our prayers lest the thieves of bitterness and entitlement and impatience and bossiness break in and steal from us. Such things would kidnap our gratitude and run off in the night if we’re not careful, if we’re not “watchful.”

- C. Now, if I had to say how I thought this idea of being watchful in our prayers with thanksgiving should work out practically in our own prayer lives, I suppose I'd have to conclude that there are something like two layers to all of this and its implications for us.

Layer One: Thanks for Answered Prayer

- A. On the one hand, Paul's exhortation to us here surely implies that we are to pray and then look for God's answer to our prayers and give him thanks accordingly.
1. Too often, right, we just rifle our requests and then we roll right on to the next items without ever even giving another thought to whether God has answered, how he's shown up in response to previous prayers, etc.
 - a. We're too busy and needy with what's coming up, what's pressing now, that we don't stop to give thanks for ways he's already been faithful.
- B. In some ways, then, this call here is likened to what I'm sure many of us parents had to do with our children on Christmas morning.
1. Don't you have to pace them as they approach their presents? If we don't keep watch on them, they just rip right through one after the other after the other, without stopping to give thanks for the gift just received. Is that just my house? "Slow down, look the person in the eye who gave you the gift, and tell them thank you. Don't just go running off looking for the next one."
 - a. But that's us with our prayers. And Paul is here like spiritual dad just saying: "Hold up, pause, look at what you've already been given, look at what God is already doing, and give thanks for it!"
- C. So that's layer one. Keep record of your prayers. Watch for God's answer. And when it comes, pause and celebrate. Give him thanks.

Layer Two: Thanks in Every Prayer

- A. But, on the other hand, I do think there may be a second layer to this. I think part of the call here could be, not just keep an eye out for answered prayers and give thanks if you see them, but, in a sense, let gratitude permeate all of your prayers . . . all the time.
1. Retune all of your prayers, even your requests, as it were, to the key of gratitude.
- B. I think Paul knows that, in reality, if we're not careful, even our well-intentioned requests in prayer can often be used to reinforce our grumbling and discontent, rather than undermine it as it should.
1. So he says watch out for that. And try tuning all of your prayers to the key of gratitude instead.
 - a. I daresay if we were to take Paul up on this idea it would utterly transform our prayer lives! I only have time to give you one example on this, but I hope it's enough to get you going in the right direction.

- C. Imagine you're struggling with sin and a sense of guilt and, therefore, you might pray, and rightly so: "God, have mercy on me a sinner."
1. And we know from Scripture that this is a fine prayer on its own. Jesus commends that tax collector at the back of the temple for praying in such a manner.
 - a. But it doesn't take much to imagine a situation where we pray this over and over and never really lay hold on the forgiveness that is available to us in Jesus.
 - i. As such, instead of reinforcing God's mercy and our own assurance, leading to gratitude, it could in truth become a vicious spiral of sorts, where we only feel further and further condemned, as if God is grumpy and withholding. We're not sure, so we keep praying.
 - (1) It's a reflection of our own sense of guilt and shame, but it never arrives at gratitude because it never truly arrives at God and the cross.
- D. So being "watchful" in that prayer for forgiveness "with thanksgiving" might mean we say not just "God, have mercy on me a sinner", but . . .
1. "God, thank you, that you are a God of mercy, that you are a God merciful and gracious, and abounding in steadfast love (cf. [Exod. 34:6](#));
 2. thank you that you delight not in the death of the wicked but the wicked might turn and be saved (cf. [Ezek. 33:11](#));
 3. thank you that there is forgiveness with you that you might be feared (cf. [Ps. 130:4](#));
 4. thank you that you welcome the prodigal with open arms and an open heart (cf. [Luke 15:20](#));
 5. thank you that Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (cf. [John 1:29](#));
 6. thank you that Christ became sin on my behalf so that in him I might become the righteousness of God (cf. [2 Cor 5:21](#));
 7. thank you that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (cf. [Rom. 8:1](#));
 8. thank you that though I fall I shall rise, because even though I have sinned against him, my God, the God of my salvation, will hear my cry for mercy and he will at last plead my cause in Jesus Christ and vindicate me, sinner though I am (cf. [Mic. 7:7-9](#)).
 9. Thank you God for your mercy!"
 - a. Did you hear what just happened there? (And you could do the same when praying for healing or guidance or provision or whatever it may be.)
 - i. But, in any case, retuning this request to the key of gratitude recontextualizes it, it locates it now within the sphere of grace.
- E. One of the things I love about this call to be watchful in our prayers with thanksgiving is that it sets us on a hunt to find places in Scripture that reveal God's character and promises in ways relevant to our particular circumstance and struggle.

1. If we're going to pray with gratitude, even on the near side of his intervention and help, we're going to have to start praying the Scriptures.
 - a. Paul is not calling us to some cheap, gloss-coated gratitude here.
 - b. He's talking about being watchful in your prayers with thanksgiving, because there is always something to give thanks for, even when you're up to your neck in condemnation (or whatever it may be for you).
 - i. And you find it when at last you stop looking at your struggle, looking at your struggle, looking at your struggle . . . and, instead, you start looking at God.
 - (1) That's what will move you from just ground-level prayer, where you're just stuck down here and you're starting to spiral, to the kind of prayer that breaks through the ceiling, catches a glimpse of God . . . and gives thanks!
- F. And I think this leads us towards the answer to our second question now: what's the reason for this exhortation—why does Paul call us to this, on what basis can he do such a thing?
1. I mean, that's a bit gutsy isn't it, he just assumes there's always stuff to be thankful for. Well, that's because there is.

Question #2: What's the Reason?

- A. This becomes clear when we trace this theme of gratitude out as it appears elsewhere in this letter to the Colossians.
 1. What we see when we do this is that our gratitude is tethered ultimately to the gospel and triumph of grace for us at the cross.
- B. I only have time to give you one example. Look at [Col. 1:11-14](#), where Paul writes this: “¹¹ May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”
 1. You can give thanks to God right now, whatever you may be dealing with, whatever seemingly unanswered prayers you may still be wrestling with, why?
 - a. Because in an ultimate sense your destiny has been commandeered and transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - i. You were once under sway of the domain of darkness and headed towards hell, but at the cross, through the shed blood of our Savior, your redemption has been purchased, your forgiveness earned, and he has

delivered you from the domain of darkness and transferred you into his own kingdom of light and glory.

- C. Are you Christ's here this morning? Have you repented and trusted the work of Jesus for you on that cross?
 - 1. If not what's holding you back from faith? Come to him today!
 - 2. If so, what's holding you back from gratitude? Behold your Savior and your God!
 - a. The whole trajectory of your life has changed because of him. And whatever you may be dealing with now, he says: "Listen, it will all work for your ultimate good in the end!"
- D. This is why Paul can so boldly call us to give thanks in our prayers even if all seems to be coming down around us. It's why he would say later in [Col. 3:17](#): "[W]hatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."
 - 1. Jesus has conquered Satan, sin, and death and there isn't anything that can stop him and his love for you and for me. Let's give him thanks!

Conclusion

Keeping Both Sides Together

- A. It seems to me both sides of this verse, each of these exhortations we've looked at this morning, our mutually interpreting ideas.
 - 1. They stick together. You can't get the one rightly unless it's kept in its place alongside the other. When kept together we are protected from two perilous extremes.
- B. On the one hand, one could imagine how the encouragement to be steadfast could lead to griping and grumbling, listing out demands and complaints, and we feel Paul has given us a license to do so. Don't give up, keep demanding!
 - 1. But the call to be thankful pushes against this error brings the matter back into balance. Just because we are to continue in prayer and not lose hope in our supplications, doesn't mean we're bitter and angry until God answers. He's good in it all. He's always up to something.
 - a. So some of us need to be corrected in that direction. We need to surrender some of our agenda, the stuff we're still angry at God that he's done or not done, and we need to go on a hunt for grace, we need to root ourselves in the gospel promises and give him thanks even when it's tough.
- C. But then on the other hand, one could imagine the way we might fall off on the other side of this verse. The call to be thankful in all of our prayers might inadvertently make us feel as if we can't be angry at all, like we can't list out the things that we want God to do, that we're struggling with. It

might hinder honest communication with our Father, and instead lead to the plastic Christianity I so often speak against, where everything is fake and “happy” and positive-encouraging K-love.

1. But against this now comes the call to be steadfast in our prayers. If all we’re doing is saying thanks and we have no real place we need to see God come and move, then there really is not much need for this call to be steadfast in it. This brings in the idea of intercession and supplication and begging God to move. And therefore, we remember, while we’re grateful to God, and we have so many reasons to be, we are also in a desperate place, and we need him to do more.
 - a. Listen, whatever we understand this giving thanks in prayer to mean, it has to be able to hold within its circumference the gritty, heartbroken pleas of the Psalmists. It can’t be plastic and fake. We are really praying and interceding and struggling, while we are really praising and adoring and thankful.
 - i. And some of us need to be corrected in this direction. It’s okay to come before God and just cry. It’s okay to be upset. It’s okay to be honest and pour out your heart, even if there’s some unsavory stuff in there. He already knows. He can handle it. Bring it to him again and again and again.
- D. So let’s pray this week. Let’s really pray this week. Let’s “[c]ontinue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving” (Col. 4:2).