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"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful" (Colossians 4:2).

Devotion to prayer was one of the marks of the early Church. In Acts 2:42, Luke lists four areas of devotion that marked the Jerusalem church: Apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. The rest of Acts demonstrates their devotion, as a praying Church breaks out of Judea and embarks upon its mission to the world.

God's call to His people today is for nothing less than that demonstrated by the first believers. Through dependence upon His power through prayer, we establish His kingdom in the lives of men and women everywhere, seeing Christ's kingdom advance among the nations.

In Colossians 4:2, Paul's command for us to be devoted to prayer is sharpened by the phrase, "being watchful." Watchful praying is a more intense, more kingdom-focused type of prayer. All too often our prayers can be a reflection of an unfocused, bland faith. We ask little, expecting little, and what we do ask for is more about our own desires than the purposes and plans of God.

Watchful praying takes effort. It is an aggressive sort of prayer life, recognizing that life is lived out in the midst of a battle ground. Watching and praying is a lifestyle focusing on seeing the kingdom of Christ advance and knowing that our prayers are a vital part of what God is doing on planet earth.

To watch and pray first of all means that we watch God. As we draw near in intimacy and see how God is moving, we pick up divine cues from Him as to how we should pray. Scripture speaks much of keeping our eyes on the Lord:

• "O my Strength, I watch for You; You, O God, are my fortress..." (Psalm 59:9).

• "But as for me, I watch in hope for the LORD, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me" (Micah 7:7).

• "I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what He will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint" (Habakkuk 2:1).

• "It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'" (Mark 13:34-37).

God's Word also tells us to watch what is happening around us, and sometimes even within us. There is to be an awareness of our surroundings and what God might be doing in them, so that we can pray with greater effectiveness. Here are just a few of the Scriptures that point to this way of watching and praying:

• "Look at the nations and watch—and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told" (Habakkuk 1:5).

• "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come" (Matthew 24:42).

• "Then He said to them, 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with Me.' Going a little farther, He fell with His face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will.' Then He returned to His disciples and found them sleeping. 'Could you men not keep watch with Me for one hour?' He asked Peter. 'Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation

. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak" (Matthew 26:38-41).

• "Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them" (Deuteronomy 4:9).

One of the most fascinating aspects of watchful praying is how closely it ties us to the very nature and activity of God Himself. God is a watcher! Again and again in the Bible we read of how He watches over the affairs of both nations and individuals. He calls us to join Him on His watch...to devote ourselves to watch and pray that we might participate with our Lord in His purposes. What an amazing privilege! Carefully consider these Scriptures that point to God on His watch:

• "I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you" (Genesis 28:15).

• "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you" (Psalm 32:8).

• "He rules forever by His power, His eyes watch the nations— let not the rebellious rise up against Him" (Psalm 66:7).

• "The LORD will keep you from all harm— He will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore" (Psalm 121:7-8).

• "The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good" (Proverbs 15:3).

Would you today join with a watching God? He is calling His people to such an intimate place with Him that we begin to see some aspects of what He is seeing as He allows us that privilege. Our watching is for the purpose of praying into our world the purposes and plans of God. How amazing is the grace and calling of God that He would grant us the joy and favor of laboring alongside Him through watchful praying!