

"In Closing..." - Colossians 4:2-18

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[0 : 0 0] We've said we're kind of at the point in Colossians where Paul is giving his final exhortations here, his final instructions. And what I'm going to do is I'm going to read verses 2 through 6.

We'll actually preach all the way through 18. But as you'll see, verses 7 through 18 kind of illustrates some of these verses here in 2 through 6. So I'll read verses 2 through 6 of chapter 4 in Colossians, and then I'll pray, and then we'll take a look at what Paul has to say.

Colossians 4, verse 2. Paul writes, Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which Paul says, I am in chains.

Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders. Make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the Apostle Paul who took the time while in chains to write this letter to a church in Colossae. Lord, would you help us not to take for granted those who have gone before us, who have continued to pass along your holy scriptures to us?

[1 : 4 0] Would you not take it for granted those who have proclaimed the gospel before us and to us? Would you help us now as we strive to understand the truth of your word? Would the seeds of your gospel be so deeply in our hearts that they would sprout forth life and fruit and season?

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Well, Paul's closing exhortations here are much alike if you've had a child that you've sent somewhere, maybe to camp or you're getting ready to go to a holiday or something like that.

You get them to start packing up and you say the same thing a few times, don't you? I know for ours it's call us or text us when you get there. Make sure you wash every night.

I have a young boy, so we have to say that one a few times. Make sure you wash and brush your teeth every night and obey. Maybe we'll say that again. Call us when you get there. Wash every night and obey.

And then you say it a few times, don't you? Especially with the younger ones. And then right before they get in the car, what do you do? You say it again. And you pick the most important things that you've said a few times and you say them one more time.

[2 : 5 3] And that's kind of what Paul's doing here. He's said all these things before, actually. He's given these instructions all throughout this letter to this church in Colossae. And now that they're getting ready to go to camp, as it were, that he's getting ready to send his child out, he says one more time the three most important things, according to him.

So it's important to note that in Paul's mind, these three things are of the utmost importance for this church in Colossae. Be watchful in prayer. He says be globally aware.

We'll look at that. And be God's people right there in Colossae. We'll see that again. Be watchful in prayer. Be globally aware. And then we'll say for us here to be God's people right here.

So first to be watchful in prayer, Paul says in verse 2, Colossians 4.2, he says, devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

And we say, well, what is prayer? As Connor alluded to earlier, prayer is more than just words. It's not just a vain repetition of words. Prayer is desires expressed to God.

[4 : 07] It's the desires of our heart being expressed to God Almighty. And Paul says to express our desires in words, which we call prayer.

With that, he says, devote yourselves to prayer. Persist in it. Continue to be engaged in prayer. We saw this last week when Alex led us off with Acts 2.42, that the early church, the same word here, devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship and to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

They regularly persisted in and continued to be busily engaged in what had been started, namely the life of the church there. And Paul says part of that life is to continue to be engaged in prayer.

To be devoted to prayer. Then he adds another element here. He says being watchful in prayer. Now it's interesting to note, any prayer is not a bad prayer.

The most elementary basic prayer you could ever utter is a good prayer. But there is a difference between praying, being thoughtful in prayer, and being watchful in prayer.

[5 : 30] Paul says we're to be watchful in prayer, which goes a step further. It's to be forward thinking. It's to be proactive. It's to be on the alert as we pray. I learned this as a young sailor in the U.S. Navy.

My first post was to be a lookout. They put me on the USS Hopper as a destroyer in the Pacific Ocean. And my first job was literally to stand there.

And they said, now look out. And I thought, that's the dumbest thing anybody's ever told me. I have all kinds of education, and I'm this highly qualified United States sailor, and you want me to stare at the ocean?

What kind of nonsense is that? And I remember for the first watch, six hours, I stared at the ocean. I thought, this is pointless. This is absolutely useless.

And I went down, and of course, we say a complaining sailor is a happy sailor in the U.S. Navy. And so I was complaining to the others, that's the dumbest thing I've ever done. They said, well, what did you do?

[6 : 29] I just stared at the ocean. They said, well, no wonder. It's not what you're supposed to do. So you're supposed to go kind of sector by sector and look. So the next time I went up there, I kind of look here for a bit.

Nothing. And I look there for a bit. Nothing. And I look around. Nothing. Okay, well, I'll try to get nothing. And it was boring again. I thought, well, I've been thoughtful in it. I've gone sector by sector.

It's still boring. This is pointless. So I complained again. And then a very humble, helpful captain stood next to me, and firm and stern captain.

And he said, you're supposed to be watchful as a lookout. He said, you need to not just look at each area, but you need to kind of know what could happen in that area.

And take that into account. And so he helped me as we went out to sea. And I'd stand there and he'd say, look, there's a merchant ship right there. Okay, I see it. He said, it's getting ready to come out, isn't it?

[7 : 25] It looks like it. But there's no pilot. It needs a tug. Look, the tug comes from here. And he'd point me there. And before I knew it, the whole ocean had come alive. And there was all these possibilities, these things that could happen.

And then I started to realize, I need to tell them this. Hey, the tug could come from here, this merchant ship. Before I knew it, I was being watchful as a lookout, which was very different than just staring at the ocean.

Paul says, be watchful in prayer. He says in verse 12 of Colossians 4, he notes that Epaphras, Epaphras, he says in verse 12, is one of them and a servant of Christ Jesus.

He says, he is wrestling in prayer for you. That you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. And the language there is gladiator language.

Epaphras is like a gladiator in the arena, struggling and contending and fighting for you in prayer. And our ultimate illustration, of course, is Christ at the Last Supper, where he says to Peter, he says, Peter, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.

[8 : 35] When you turn back, strengthen your brothers. Christ looked ahead and he was alert and he was watchful and he saw what was coming for Peter. And he said, I pray for you. Epaphras wrestled for them.

All of it is forward looking, opposition expecting reality in the prayer. We aren't just praying, but we are watchful in prayer.

Now, sometimes that idea can make us a bit anxious or trouble us. That's maybe a fearful endeavor to be on that much alert. Which is why Paul adds to be thankful.

Not just watchful in prayer, but thankful in prayer. We say, well, what do we have to be thankful for while we pray? I would say, first, we're praying to God Almighty. We have the privilege of praying to God Almighty.

The Creator of heaven and earth. The God who is able to do far more than we ever ask. Far more than we even think. The God who is always and ever on His throne.

[9 : 43] The God who goes before us. The God who has ultimately already won the battle. On our behalf and for His glory. And so with thankfulness, we recognize that we have the privilege of praying to God Almighty.

And prayer reminds us not only that we pray to God Almighty, but that God listens. God listens to us when we pray.

Sometimes it's worth just pausing and thinking about that. Isaiah 30 verse 19 says, God is gracious and when you cry for help, He will answer you as soon as He hears.

There's no cue to talk to God. Have you ever thought about that? And we waited an hour to kiss the Blarney Stone so that I could be a better preacher. And yet with God, there's no hour-long wait.

It's instantaneous access to the throne of the most almighty being in all of the universe. We can go right to Him. Know that He's listening.

[10 : 55] And that He's capable. See, God could have ordained that all His will be accomplished independently of our participation, but He didn't. He saw it good for us to pray to Him.

John Calvin writes that praying with thankfulness turns the human soul toward heaven and away from ourselves. Thankfulness. Thankfulness by its very nature, he says, requires that we fix our focus on God.

He says it is theocentric. It is God-centered. And so Paul says we are to be a people of prayer, devoted to prayer, watchful in prayer, thankful in prayer.

So how do we do this? How do we actually accomplish this? I have a little acronym that I use personally. I'll share with you. It's called ACT, PLEASE. And in California, we spell please P-L-Z because we're just cool like that.

We say, dude, please. And that's exactly how we spell it. So maybe for you, you say A-C-T-S, acts. That's another way. I'm not smart enough to really understand the S, so I just say please.

[12 : 03] But it stands for adore, confess, thank, and then supplication. That's why I went with P-L-Z. You can see that's a big word. Supplication means please for other people in my dictionary.

And so how do we do that? We adore, we confess, we thank, and then we supplicate on others' behalf. For example, I could pray and adore God for the beautiful creation here in Ireland.

Absolutely, stunningly beautiful land here. And as I'm adoring God for what He made that I've gotten to see over the last few months, I can confess right away that I have failed miserably in considering Ireland in my prayers during my Christian life.

I've just kind of assumed everybody was a Christian. And I've just kind of assumed that Ireland didn't really need my prayers or need missionaries here. And I can confess, Lord, I have not been on the alert for Ireland.

But then I can thank God right away because He's been at work here, hasn't He? I can thank God for being at work through Cork Baptist Church and sending Philip to plant a church in Cairagline and the members and Johnny for continuing to pastor and the elders and the deacons and everything that's gone on.

[13 : 18] Despite my lack of attention, despite my lack of thought and prayer for Ireland, clearly God's been at work and I can thank Him for that. And then I can go to please and I can say, please, Lord, continue to help the church in Ireland.

It will be hard to not be here and to just see the updates on WhatsApp. But I can continue to pray and be watchful and alert and say, Lord, please keep that church.

Keep it going strong. As they enter this next season with other preachers coming and ministries starting up, would you keep them united? And I can supplicate. You see how that's happening? And then it usually leads me into another round where I can even just recognize how God takes care of His churches.

And I can adore Him for that. I can confess my shortcomings as a church member. I can say, boy, I haven't always been a perfect church member. I've caused struggles and strife at times.

And yet again, I can thank God because the gates of hell will not prevail against His church. And then I can immediately go into supplication again. Please help the churches and pastors who are facing trials, who have difficulties within the body.

[14 : 24] And you see I'm kind of forward-looking and spiraling through this ACTS or act, please, way of praying. And one thing just leads me to another.

And before I know it, time's flown by. And I've been devoted and watchful and thankful in prayer. What Paul says is as we're devoted to and watchful and thankful in prayer, he says we will also become globally aware.

That's our next point. As we adore God and we confess and we thank Him and we pray for others, he says we will become globally aware.

Paul expresses this in verses 3-4. He says, Pray for us too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ for which I am in chains.

Pray that I may proclaim it clearly as I should. And so it's interesting to note, Paul says it's not just enough to be devoted and watchful and thankful in prayer, but we must have a global mindset when it comes to the Kingdom of God.

[15 : 38] He says that this praying with a global mindset, or to be globally aware, consists of praying both that doors would be opened and that the Gospel would be clearly proclaimed.

Which connects us back to the idea of being watchful, doesn't it? That doors would be opened. That's forward-thinking. That the Gospel would be clearly proclaimed.

That's forward-thinking. I'll never forget about five years ago, I was in Albania, which sounds like a weird place to be. No, I wasn't filming the movie Taken.

I was there to meet some pastors and to meet the Christians there. And I'll never forget, this was 2014, and I was walking along the coast in Albania, and I was just enjoying listening to a John Piper sermon.

Just walking along, enjoying listening to a podcast, and I had to stop dead in my tracks because in the John Piper sermon from 1986, he said boldly and loudly, God will be glorified in Albania.

[16 : 42] And I paused and said, whoa, I'm right here in Albania. But the weird thing about that was in 1986, there were not any Christians in Albania.

At least not publicly. Because it was a forced, communist, atheist country, and Christians were not allowed to say they were Christians, or to gather as Christians, or to receive the teaching of the Word of God as Christians, until 1991.

And so I was struck by the fact that five years before communism fell in Albania, here's John Piper saying and proclaiming and praying that God would be glorified in a closed off communist, atheistic country.

He was watchful in prayer, and he was globally aware. And then I started to think, how come the moment the borders were opened in that country, how come the moment they were opened, there were Christian missionaries coming in, speaking Albanian, ready to share the Gospel with these people, it's because they had been globally aware.

They had been waiting for those borders to open. They had been waiting for the door to be opened. That they may go in and clearly proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.

[18 : 00] Where else are the doors not opened right now? Where else can we not send missionaries with the good news of Jesus Christ right now? Do we pray for those countries?

Do we even think about those countries? Do we look down upon those countries? They're so terrible and evil. Of course they are. The doors haven't been opened for the Gospel message to be proclaimed there yet.

Christianity is a globally aware people. It's the heartbeat of the Christian church. And Christians are called to be globally minded.

And we were called to be globally minded far before humanity was ever globally connected. And I want you to look with me in verses 7-16 and think about this. This is 65 A.D.

And look how in 65 A.D. before there was internet, before there was mass communication, look how globally minded the church already was. In verse 7, Paul says, Tychicus will tell you all the news about me.

[19 : 05] He is a dear brother and a faithful minister in the Lord. And Tychicus is going to be leaving Rome to go to Colossae to tell the Colossians about Paul and Rome.

And that's interesting to know because that's a one month journey through a very dangerous world. And interestingly enough, Paul says in verse 9, he's coming with Onesimus.

Onesimus is a slave who ran away from Colossae. Who's going back to the place that he escaped from to share what God's doing in Rome.

In verse 10, Paul says, My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings. And it's interesting to note, Aristarchus is from Thessalonica, which is in Greece. He's gone from Greece and traveled with Paul and proclaimed the Gospel in other countries all the way to the point where he is a prisoner in Rome with Paul.

He says, So does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. And we know Mark is from Jerusalem, which is a six month journey from Rome. Verse 12, we saw Epaphras, who is one of you.

[20 : 16] That is, he's one of the Colossians. Paul says in verse 13, I vouch for him, for he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. Okay, and that kind of made up this region called the Lycus Valley, which would be like a county, maybe, in Ireland.

So they say, Epaphras is not just praying and struggling and working on behalf of one city here in this county, but many of them here in the county. And then verse 14, he says, Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings.

And we know Luke is from Antioch and he's traveled all over the world with Paul, recording what God's been doing. And from his hand and the work of the Holy Spirit, we get the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

You see the global awareness there. And then in verse 15, give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea and Nympha and the church in her house. And then in verse 16, after this letter has been read to you, see that it is read in the church of Laodiceans.

And that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea. You see the global awareness here, don't you? They're all over the place. God's people are going back and forth from city to city and they're moving God's Word around as they go.

[21 : 32] It's important to note that this is God's intention. Every tribe, every tongue, every nation would hear the good news of Jesus Christ. Lest we forget, each of us first heard this good news because somebody proclaimed it clearly.

Somebody clearly told us the good news of salvation in Christ. I find it fascinating that Paul would say to pray for Him.

If there's anybody we would think could clearly proclaim the Gospel around the world, it'd be the Apostle Paul. And yet he asks for prayer that he could clearly proclaim the Gospel.

Paul refuses to rely on his own eloquence or his own skill or his own theological knowledge alone. He says, pray for me that I may clearly proclaim the Gospel.

People are Christians for, or not Christians, I would say, for one of three reasons here. If someone says, I'm not a Christian, I would say either they have not heard the message of the Gospel, or secondly, they heard it, but they did not understand it, or thirdly, maybe having heard and understood the Gospel, they don't believe it.

[22 : 57] Paul says, let's not have number one and two be the reason why people aren't Christians. He says, pray that they hear the Gospel. Pray that it's clear that they can understand the Gospel.

And the third one is between them and God. But we are called to number one and two. So again, maybe some practical application. How can we be globally aware?

How can we be praying that doors would be open that are closed now, that the Gospel would be clearly proclaimed? A few ideas for you. Here's the church mission bulletin.

I think it's just right there in the back. You can take this, tuck it in your Bible, and every once in a while just flip through it and pray for the missionaries in here. Think about what's going on.

We've had the Grindys here. We've had people from Radstock coming in and out. I know there's several missionaries. You have people coming from Munster Bible College. You have people coming in and out of this church from all over the world. It's amazing.

[23 : 57] It's beautiful. You pray for these people. Reach out to them. Send them a letter. I think the Grindys said the children send cards to their children. What a blessing. Go and visit them.

Another one I do. This sounds funny. I know. I look at what I eat, which is weird. I don't mean it in a health sense. I mean it in a prayerful sense. I bought olives from Spain the other day in Little.

I'm thinking that's funny. I'm in Ireland buying olives from Spain. And then I start thinking, I don't know any Christians in Spain. Maybe you do. I start thinking, I wonder what is going on in Spain. And we have this great advantage.

We can get on the internet and start looking for missionaries in Spain. And what is going on? And we can just pray through. While you're sitting there eating your silly olives, you can be praying for Christians in Spain. And then read and watch the news.

Most of us are probably somewhat aware of what's going on in the world. But don't just read the news. Don't just watch the news to be informed. But let it sink in that these are real people all around the globe that really need Jesus.

[25 : 05] I don't know if you saw our president, President Trump, is trying to buy Greenland. I didn't even know this was possible. But I've been watching, oh, we're going to buy Greenland. This is news to me. Apparently I go home and there's going to be a 51st state potentially.

It doesn't look like we'll get it. But I started reading about that and I started looking and did you know that suicide rates in Greenland are through the roof? Alcoholism is enormous in Greenland.

There's a hurting people there. And while we can read about it and kind of chuckle it, what is President Trump doing? It's not a real estate transaction. These are real people and as Christians we can go, oh, they really are hurting there.

Imagine living in a country where people are talking about buying you. Where you're struggling. Where you're hurting. Are there Christians there? Can we be praying for them?

So Paul says, be watchful in prayer and be globally aware. Now, the trap here, the problem here is sometimes we start to think that means every single Christian must go somewhere else.

[26 : 11] Okay? That kind of becomes a natural thought. I've got to leave and I've got to go somewhere else. Now, I want you to notice he hasn't said that. Look with me at verses 5-6.

He says, be wise in the way you act toward outsiders. Make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Nowhere has Paul said you must leave Colossae. Has he? We've read through the entire letter for 12 weeks. There's no command that says Colossian Christians leave.

It's not there. In fact, he said the opposite. He said, live life right here where you are. I draw your attention to that word outsiders.

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders. Paul clearly established early on in this letter that as Christians we are inside the kingdom of light.

[27 : 18] He says that in Colossians 1.13. We are inside the kingdom of light. And the problem for us here is that in here, in this room, we feel like we are God's holy people and we are in the kingdom.

And that's true. It's easy to feel that way in here because we're all in here together. And the problem becomes when we go out of here. Right? When we go out of here we're tempted to feel like we're no longer in here.

We're out there and maybe we're not in with other people. Paul says even though you go out of here we're still in the kingdom of light.

And those who are not in the kingdom of light are indeed the outsiders. It's very important to understand this distinction. We go out into the world being people who are people in a kingdom of light.

And even though we feel like an outsider we're not. It's those who have not come to faith in Jesus Christ who are on the outside. And so what should we do about that?

[28 : 33] Should we boast about our status in the kingdom of light? Should we walk out of here and go stand out in the park and say I'm in the kingdom of light? Sorry guys. You're not.

No. That's not what Paul says. Should we go out here and take it for granted and say I can do whatever I want. I'm a Christian. I live in the kingdom of light. No. Paul says we don't do that.

He says we are to be wise gracious salty people who make the most of every opportunity to proclaim the gospel.

Note the connection between verse 3 and verse 6. Verse 3 Paul says that God may open a door for our message is how they should pray for him. And as Alex predicted I'll use a little bit of Greek the word is just logos.

that God may open the door for us to proclaim the word of Christ. And in verse 6 he uses the same word. Let your logos, let your proclamation of the word of Christ be full of grace.

[29 : 37] What did he just say? He says the Colossians they proclaim the same message that Paul was proclaiming. Which means that we 2,000 years later we still proclaim the same message Paul proclaimed.

The same message the Colossians proclaimed. Christianity is an ancient message that is held true across the sands of time. And you don't have to go anywhere special to proclaim the truth of the gospel.

We saw last week we can proclaim it at home, we can proclaim it at work, and you can especially proclaim it right here where God's got you. So here's the deal, I'm not called to your home, but you are.

I'm not called to your workplace this week, but you are. For this next season of life, I'm not even called to Ireland anymore, but ye are, aren't you?

Ye are. you dudes got to stay, because the gospel still needs to be proclaimed, right here in Carigoline, in County Cork.

[30 : 57] So Paul would say to you, as he said to the Colossians, he would say, be wise in the way you act toward the non-Christians here in Carigoline. Make the most of every opportunity that God brings your way this year, through every relationship you have right here.

Let your conversation with your family, with your friends, with your co-workers, with those who come to Polo, and come to Rooted, and come to the Rock, and come to the Bible studies, let them be full of grace and seasoned with salt.

Go into your homes and let your conversations be full of grace and seasoned with salt. Go to work and be a gracious, godly people of light. Right here, right now, right where he has you.

And Paul closes out the letter in verse 18. He signs it by saying, I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hands.

Remember my chains. Grace be with you. And you see, we get the dramatic turn of the table, as it were, because we find out it's not Paul sending the Colossians off to holiday or camp, is it?

[32 : 10] It's Paul that's headed out. It's Paul that's headed towards the Roman guillotine for Christ's sake. It's Paul saying, follow him as he follows Christ, not to the ends of the world, but to heaven.

And he's saying, as he does his work right there in Rome, in chains, he's telling them, and he's telling you here in Kerrigaline, follow him as he follows Christ onward and upward, but do it right here, right where God's got you, being watchful in prayer, being globally aware, and being God's people right here.

Let's pray.