

Partnering in the Gospel that Bears Fruit

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[0:00] Well, the Olympics are over, and it was great to see some of our teams win gold. So like the women's rugby won gold. And I actually enjoy playing team sport, not women's rugby, of course, but I used to play soccer in my younger days.

We even made it to the finals one year, which was pretty exciting. And we had one guy who was a good goalie and another guy who was a pretty good striker who scored 80% of our goals.

That wasn't me. I know you were wondering. In fact, I hadn't scored a goal at all that season. In fact, all two seasons. And my lack of scoring was so bad that the boys in my team felt sorry for me.

And so during the last game, we were up, and so they all started yelling out, give the ball to Pricey! Give the ball to Pricey! Felt like a charity case. But anyway, someone did. And so with the ball at my feet, I took it off towards the goal.

I was determined to score. In fact, so determined that I looked funny and someone took a photo of me. I think it's on the next slide. Here I am on the next slide in all my stride.

[1:04] No, not yet. There are... And the word determination down the bottom. So I was off. And I lined up the ball at the goal, kicked it as hard as I could, and I bent it like Beckham, and I...

Yeah, missed. In fact, I bent it too much, unlike Beckham, and the ball flew off to the side, off my boot in the other direction. Luckily, another player on our team picked up the ball, and most went directly to him, actually, and then he did score.

Afterwards, he actually caught up with me and said, oh, you're such a team player, passing the ball instead of shooting for a goal. I was shooting for a goal. But obviously, it's just not my role on the team, not my gift.

I found my gift, my role on the team. I made a really good substitute. But team sports like rugby or AFL or soccer, I think they're a good example of people working together in partnership.

The players all have the same big goal, to win, but they play different roles or positions on the team, whether it's a forward or a back or a wing and so on. And they work together in their different roles to achieve the common goal.

[2:16] And so as we come to the last part of Paul's letter to the Colossian church, we see a whole team of people working in partnership. You might remember from the Bible readings we had, there was this list of names, and Alison, you did very well to pronounce them all.

There's Paul, Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, Luke the Doctor, Epaphras, including the Colossians themselves. Just to name a few of them. A whole team of people playing different roles, but all working together for the same two goals.

Firstly, to see people become Christians, and secondly, to see people grow as Christians. And they had those goals because that is what God is on about in the world.

God is on about rescuing and reconciling people to himself, and growing them in his image, and to be who we were created to be. And the way God does this is to work through his people.

And just like the Israelites from our first reading, who were to be a kingdom of priests to the nations around them. God works through his people, Christians, us, in partnership to proclaim the gospel message about Jesus.

[3:28] So that people might become Christians and grow as Christians. And so just have a look, let me just quickly recap. So turn back to chapter 1, verse 3.

We see this idea of what God is doing in the world through this gospel. Paul writes, chapter 1, verse 3, And notice this, You see, God is sending out his gospel message all over the world through people like Epaphras.

And the gospel is bearing fruit as people hear it and believe it and become Christians. For this gospel message tells them about Jesus who died on a cross and rose again.

And he died on a cross to pay for our sins, so that we who believe this message, we who believe Jesus, can be saved from the judgment we deserve. We can be rescued from darkness and reconciled to God.

If you've got your Bibles there, just look at the way Paul puts it in verse 12 of chapter 1. Next column. He says, Or just have a look at the next column at the top of the page, chapter 1, verse 21.

[5:28] Chapter 1, verse 21, towards the top of the page there. Once you were alienated from God, and you were enemy, we were enemies in our minds because of our evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you wholly in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

If you continue in your faith, established and firm, and not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel message that you have heard, the message about Jesus that you have heard, and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become its servant.

You see, the gospel literally means news. And it is the news about Jesus who died to save us from judgment, to rescue us from darkness, to reconcile us to God, with new spiritual life in his kingdom now, and the hope of new physical life and a heavenly inheritance later.

I'm guessing you've all heard about the recent earthquakes in Italy. I think it was last week. What you may not have heard about is eight-year-old Julia Rinaldi, who, as the headline on the next slide says, she gave her life to save her sister as the roof fell in.

See, when the rescuers found her sister, Julia was on top of her, kind of face down in a protective kind of pose. And so the rubble fell on Julia's back, but in doing so, saved her four-year-old sister, Georgia, beneath.

[7:07] But you see, that's what Jesus has done for us. The difference, of course, is that neither girl deserved to die in that earthquake, but we deserve judgment for the way we've treated God.

And yet, Christ's death shields us. It's as though his death covers us and takes the earthquake of God's judgment for us, so that we who believe can have life, spiritual life now in his kingdom, and a certain hope of new physical life later in heaven.

This is the message of the gospel. And so, can I firstly ask, do you believe that message? It's the difference between being spiritually in the dominion of darkness or spiritually in the kingdom of God.

Between being God's enemies or his reconciled precious children, whom we can call Father on this Father's Day. It's the difference, actually, between heaven and hell.

Do you believe this news about Jesus? For it's our only way to be saved with the hope of heaven, to become a Christian. And yet, this gospel message not only saves people, it also grows people.

[8:19] And so we saw next in Colossians, in chapter 1, verse 28, Paul continuing to proclaim Christ and the gospel to the Colossians. So chapter 1, verse 28, it says, He, Christ, is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.

You see, the message about Jesus, the gospel, not only saves people when they believe, it also grows us who already do believe it. It points us to Christ so that we might grow more like Him.

And so this is why the Colossians were told not to add anything else to this gospel. No tradition, no extra philosophy, and so on. And so have a look at chapter 2, verse 6, the right-hand side of the page there.

The key verses we saw for the whole letter. So then, just as you receive Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in Him. Rooted and built up in Him.

Strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world, rather than on Christ.

[9:34] You see, God is on about seeing people become Christians, safe from judgment, and grow as Christians into maturity. And the way He does both is to work through people in partnership to proclaim His gospel.

Now the reason I've spent so long going over this is not just to give a recap because it's our last one in the series. It's also that we remember why Paul and his team of partners are doing.

What they're on about and why they are on about it. You see, they are seeking to see these gospel messages go out because it's the way that God both saves people and grows people.

And so Paul begins by addressing the Colossians and the role that they can play in that process. Which brings us to our passage today, chapter 4, verse 2 on the next page of your Bibles. He says, he begins by saying, devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

Here Paul urges them to be devoted in prayer or literally to persevere in prayer. That's quite an apt description really because prayer does take perseverance, doesn't it?

[10:47] I mean, if something bad suddenly happens we often find it easy to pray, don't we? But after a while it kind of gets harder. And regular ongoing prayer is hard to keep making time to do.

We often leave it till late at night and end up falling asleep on God. Has that ever happened to you? And so actually I saw this little 30 second video clip. I can relate to this.

See if you can. So Tim, on that... Yep, that was it. We just might need the volume all the way up to... My prayer life is vibrant and it's active daily.

I like to commune with God at night time. I get under those warm covers and I kiss my wife goodnight and I just start talking to God. Just me and God telling Him everything.

Makes me just sleepy just thinking about it. And there I am just laying in bed laying out my request to Him and He's hearing me and I know that I'm in good company with Him.

[11:55] Where was I? Sound familiar? Maybe it's just me. I don't know. And so prayer is a struggle sometimes.

It's something you have to persevere in. In fact, it's comforting to know that even people in the Bible found it a struggle. So in verse 12 of our passage today it says, Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus sends greetings.

He is always, notice, wrestling in prayer for you. That you may stand firm in all the will of God mature and fully assured. That's the word wrestle.

It's the same word that Paul uses back in chapter 1 verse 29 where he contends or struggles works hard in his ministry. In other words, even these great people of the Bible found prayer hard work.

And so if you find it a struggle then take heart you're normal. If you find it easy then you've probably got the gift of prayer but for most it's something we must work at. Keep persevering in.

[12:57] Keep devoting ourselves to. Use different tools. One person I know has a prayer journal and he'll write down prayer points and then he can look back and see how things have been answered.

Or use that app I introduced you to Prayer Mate or whatever. We had to persevere in praying. And while the Bible encourages us to pray about everything that matters to us the context here suggests we're especially to pray for the gospel to go out so that people can become Christians and grow as Christians.

You see this in verse 3 in particular. Verse 3 Paul says 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 I am in chains he says.

Paul asks the Colossians to pray especially that God would open doors for this message to be proclaimed. By the way it reminds us that all of this you know people becoming Christians and growing as Christians it ultimately depends on God.

God is the one who opens doors who opens doors to opportunities for people to hear. God is the one who opens the doors of people's hearts to believe and so we must pray for this.

[14:12] Verse 3 suggests that the prayer that Paul particularly has in mind in verse 2 is for gospel growth is for the gospel to go out is for people to become Christians and grow as Christians because this is what God is on about in the world and it matters to Paul because that's what God's on about in the world.

I mean Paul is in prison isn't he? He's in chains and yet he does not ask them to pray that God would open a door to his cell he asks them to pray that God would open a door for the gospel message to be proclaimed.

In fact in verse 4 he also adds and literally pray that I may make it known as I must speak it. The word should in our English versions is a little bit weak and Paul actually says he must speak this gospel because it is the job that God gave him to do God commissioned him to do it chapter 1 verse 25 this is his role on the team he's like a forward who proclaims the message publicly but here's the thing to note for us although Paul might be the one up front the Colossians role in praying for Paul is still equally important because it is ultimately God's work.

Last May was the Formula 1 championship and Daniel Ricciardo was winning the race but when he pulled into his pit the pit team did not have the tyres ready can you believe that?

A million dollar industry so I think on the next slide I might have to skip one to the newspaper article keep going keep going keep going that's the prayer mate there we are so you can't see down the bottom but they just didn't have the tyres ready now when you spend millions of dollars on this industry and not to have the tyres ready when it's your job to have the tyres ready you can understand why Ricciardo was a little upset but here's the point Ricciardo is only as good as his pit team if they aren't ready with the tyres then he's actually sitting there in the race losing it so also with Paul he knows that without prayers for God to open doors he cannot preach the gospel especially given he is in chains under house arrest he cannot do his job of proclaiming as he must without the prayers of his team which God uses to open doors you see and so this means that praying for our link missionaries and for others who preach the gospel is a vital role that we can play in seeing the gospel go out that people might become

[16 : 46] Christians and grow as Christians so don't ever underestimate prayers importance it's how God chooses to work by using our prayers well the Colossians first role in ours is to pray especially for the gospel to go out and for those who speak it now at this point you might think well that sounds good I can handle praying as long as I don't have to actually do any face-to-face talking or the technical word evangelism but we actually have a role to play in that too which brings us to point two yet our role will look different to people like Paul let's have a look at verse five he says be wise in the way you act towards outsiders make the most of every opportunity he says Paul starts by saying we're to be wise in the way we act towards non-Christians and in Colossians the wisdom comes up a bit and Paul's already said in chapter two verse three that all the treasures of wisdom is found in Christ and so if you want to know how to live wisely then look at Christ if you want to know how to live wisely towards non-Christians then live like Christ that's what he's saying we're to live in a godly way towards outsiders in the way that we speak in the way that we act and we live openly authentic

Christian lives in other words and in so doing Paul assumes that this will provoke a conversation or questions because in verse six he says let your conversation be always full of grace seasoned with salt so that you may know how to answer everyone notice the word answer Paul assumes that our godly actions and speech will lead to people questioning us and then we must answer and notice that when we do answer our conversation must be full of grace seasoned with salt he says in other words the way we speak is to be gracious and tasteful to the situation Peter says something similar in 1 Peter 3 on the next slide he says always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have but do this with gentleness and respect keeping a clear conscience I may have shared with you before about going door knocking one time with this guy whom we'll call Larry and on one occasion the person who answered the door was someone who was on shift work and we'd actually woken them up and so they were gracious enough to kind of at least hear what we had to say and so we explained to them that we were inviting them to a

Christmas event at the local church if they would like to come and they replied I can't think you've just woken me up so no thank you and they began to close the door but then Larry put his foot in the door in their door and said well why not needless to say that this was not full of grace or tasteful for the situation nor did it make the gospel attractive you see our conversation our answers are to be full of grace and seasoned with salt not full of salt so people season is tasteful for the situation we're to speak the truth yes don't shy away from it but speak it in love then we will know how to answer everyone with the right manner and notice this is different to Paul who must preach publicly we don't necessarily do that rather our role is to live openly authentic Christian lives that might provoke questions and if they ask then we must answer the word must is missing from verse six but it's there must answer in a gracious manner so I remember playing squash with a non-Christian guy who I didn't know well my wife

Michelle and his wife were friends and so we were the tag along guys who were kind of trying to get to know each other and so we played a game of squash and I lost and on the way home I remember him saying to me well do you want to go out for drinks tonight and I said oh no I can't I've got Bible study tonight without even thinking I kind of just blurted out he goes you've got Bible what I've never heard of this thing before and so I mean it wasn't really a question but well the intonation was a question so I answered and I explained what Bible study was about and why we did it and I had a chance to say a little bit about Jesus now I'd love to say that he's since become a Christian but he hasn't yet you never know how God might use you in someone else's journey either way we're to live an authentic Christian life we're just act and speak Christianly talk normally about church Bible study prayer and in so doing people may ask questions and if they do then we must answer with gracious and tasteful speech of course like prayer this is all easier said than done isn't it so it's worth being equipped to share some answers which is why over the years we've run courses here at

Holy Trinity about sharing your faith and your testimony that's why we model testimonies here a month by month we had boof last Sunday it's why my buddy's Bible study group will be looking at some common questions that non-Christians ask but even then it's still hard and so like with prayer it's worth remembering the time that we live in in verse 5 it says making the most of every opportunity literally buying back the time in other words time is limited Jesus could return at any moment which I think is what watch will refers to back in verse 2 and so in light of what God is doing in the world sending the gospel out so that it bears fruit in the light of the fact that Jesus could return at any moment and that people could pass away at any time we're to make the most of every opportunity we have perhaps even be a little proactive about making opportunities so for one person in our congregation they have a scripture verse at the bottom of all their emails it's a gentle way that might get people thinking for another person in our congregation they saw a non-Christian in their mother's group doing it tough so they provided some meals for them in other words they lived an authentic Christian life towards them loving them as God says to love your neighbor which might have led to conversation these are the sorts of things we can do to play a role in speaking the gospel now I know everyone is flat out busy but really all we're to do is live our busy lives authentically be genuine about being a Christian and keep an eye out for the opportunities to love outsiders that we might provoke questions and give answers well in the following verses we meet some more players on the team who play slightly different roles but we'll move more quickly now so point three verse seven he says

[23 : 45] Tychius will tell you all the news about me he is a dear brother a faithful minister and a fellow servant in the Lord I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances that is Paul and Timothy and that he may encourage your hearts he is coming with Onesimus our faithful and dear brother who is one of you from Colossae they will tell you everything that is happening here and so here the first group we meet are Tychius and Onesimus who are like brothers in arms they are dear to Paul literally loved by Paul and they faithfully serve with him in fact it's these two people who are bringing this very letter to the church in the city of Colossae it may have even been Tychius who read the letter to the church perhaps even explained it like I'm doing now his role also included verse eight encouraging their hearts why well it seems the Colossians were concerned for Paul in fact in verses seven to nine

Paul says three times that these men will tell the Colossians about Paul's news verse seven his circumstances verse eight and about everything that's happening verse nine in other words the Colossians seem concerned for Paul they want to know how he's going they're worried about him and so these men will tell them and encourage their hearts that's another role that people can play by encouraging others asking after others who involved in frontline gospel work so here at Holy Trinity one of the people we've supported is a guy called Ronald who's working in Myanmar in a much poorer country and last June there was flooding there you might remember and people from Holy Trinity wrote emails asked after him encouraged him find out how he found out how he was going it's always nice to know that people care about you isn't it in fact some at this church even raised money to buy a car for Ronald to do ministry more easily it's another role we can do in partnership in the gospel showing practical concern and help and then in verses 10 to 11 we have some co-workers who comfort my fellow prisoner

Aristarchus sends you his greetings as does Mark the cousin of Barnabas you have received instructions about him if he comes to you welcome him Jesus who is also called justice also sends greetings these are the only Jews among my co-workers for the kingdom and they have proved a comfort for me it seems that Aristarchus is in prison with Paul which is probably house arrest in Rome they could receive visitors and instead of an ankle monitor they had an ankle chain that was that linked to a Roman guard and Aristarchus we know traveled to Paul with Paul to Rome and it seems he voluntarily offered to be a prisoner with Paul to comfort him can you imagine doing that we've got some linked missionaries in the Middle East and some of them have here machine gun fire down the road at the street imagine doing that oh that's all right I'll come and stay with you so I can encourage you and support you that's what Aristarchus did actually I have a friend who's a missionary in Fiji I might go there and stay with him that'll be all right the point is here are more people playing slightly different roles but still co-workers for the kingdom still on the same team with the same goals of seeing the gospel go out so that people can be saved and grow as

Christians because that is what God is on about well let me finish with a story I recently heard about a lady from another church she'd been going to the same hairdresser for some years and so she'd built up with a relationship with her and based on this part of the Bible that she heard she decided to pray one day for an opportunity to come that she might say something about Jesus to her hairdresser that you know the hairdresser might be provoked to ask a question and so on and so she prayed that morning of her hair appointment she went to the appointment and she decided to start off on some common ground and said look isn't the news terrible at the moment these days with all that's happening in in Syria and Aleppo and things like that and the hairdresser responded yes it's almost as though the world needs a saviour isn't it now the hairdresser was not a Christian yet in answer to this lady's prayer that's the question she posed it's almost as though the world needs a saviour isn't it what better opening could you ask for than that we're to play our role in seeing the gospel go out because that's what saves people that's what grows people as

Christians and our role includes praying includes proclaiming and includes doing some of these other things that we see in this chapter so the question is will you play a role in seeing this great news about our great Lord go out so that more and more can be saved and more and more can grow let's pray our gracious heavenly father we do thank you for these examples we have in your word where people work together in partnership to see the great news of our Lord Jesus go out so that more and more can be reconciled and rescued brought into your kingdom and so that we who are already in it can also grow into maturity father we know this is not always easy to do so we ask for your help in it please help us to play our role in this team of your people so that more and more people might come to know Jesus be saved and that together we might grow into maturity like

[29:26] Christ we ask it all in his name amen you