

Colossians 4:2-6

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Preacher: David Moser

[0 : 00] Really excited to open up God's word with you today. So if you will open with me to Colossians chapter 4.! We're going to begin in verse 2. And while we turn there, I am going to pray for our time together.

Father, in these next moments, will the words of my mouth, the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight. Oh, Lord, our rock.

I'm not a believer. In Christ's name and for his sake, amen. If you don't have a Bible, we'd love to give you one on the back table there between the proclaim and the build signs.

They are already bookmarked to today's passage. We're going to begin in Colossians 2.

Excuse me, Colossians 4, verse 2. The Apostle Paul says, Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

[1 : 02] At the same time, pray also for us that God may open to us a door for the word to declare the mystery of Christ on account of which I am in prison, that I may make it clear which is how I ought to speak.

Walk in wisdom towards outsiders, making the best use of time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. Today, Paul begins wrapping up his letter to the Colossian Christians. And he ends much as he began.

He opened the letter with his prayer. And now that he's shown them the heights of Christ's glory, he's closing it saying, devote yourselves to prayer.

He began with a prayer for the church. And now that he's shown them how to live with eyes on Christ, he asks that the church grant praise for him.

[2 : 07] That progression, Paul modeling prayer and then asking for it in return, expecting them to follow him in it. That means that he expects that something has happened to them through this letter.

Has something happened to you through this letter? Have you grown? Have you been encouraged? Have you been challenged? I wonder.

The apostle expects it as he writes it. He expects that the Colossian church has heard his words. And the glory of Christ that he set forth in chapter 1, 15 to 23, has captured them.

He expects that they've taken chapter 2, verses 6 to 7 to heart and sought to walk by the same faith through which they received Christ and his grace.

He expects that they've begun dismantling their culture's false narratives and their own hearts' inappropriate values, as he instructed them in chapter 2, 8 and following.

[3 : 25] And then they heard him in chapter 2, 16 and onwards and started walking freely in Christ, not submitting to rules that people like to add on to the Bible.

They've heeded his call in chapter 3, verse 1 to set their gaze on Jesus for their joy, for their sanctification.

He's led them in chapter 3, verse 5 and following. And they've begun the hard work of going to war with their own sin.

Recognizing that Jesus is restoring the image he first bestowed on mankind in the garden, his image, life as it should be. He expects that as they submit to chapter 3, 12 and following, that they've begun clothing themselves in his righteousness, his righteous life, by flooding their lives with the things of Christ.

So that they're changed from the inside out. And as that has taken root in their work and in their home, as we saw last week, all their obedience was rooted in a repeated refrain, in the Lord.

[4 : 53] So through the Apostle Paul, God wrote this letter to change people. Paul expects that from them.

That's why he models prayer at the beginning and says, now you follow me in it. God intends to change people, to change their minds, to change their hearts, to change the way they live their lives.

Have you been changed by this word? If you have, you won't have trouble with Paul's instructions here, chapter 4, verse 2.

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. Now, Paul could have simply said, pray, or pray a lot, right?

Instead, he says, continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it, or, some translations, devote yourselves to prayer.

[6 : 00] He's continuing something that we saw earlier in chapter 3. The Christian life is an active thing. Chapter 3, verse 1, seek the things that are above.

It's tearing our eyes away from things of this world and setting them on heavenly things. Chapter 3, verse 5, put to death what is earthly in you.

The Christian life is making war on sin and the sin that's in our hearts. And in verse 12 of chapter 3, put on or clothe yourselves with the righteousness of Christ.

The Christian life is striving to grow more and more into the holiness of Jesus, and he follows those active instructions. not just by saying pray, but devote yourselves to prayer.

And for emphasis as being watchful. Because the Christian life is active. It's life on purpose. It's not just showing up at church on Sunday.

[7 : 07] Come ready to fix your gaze on Christ, to worship him, to draw life from the one who is the way, the truth, and the life. The Christian life isn't just praying a prayer and then posting through life until you get to the permacates.

It's making war on the new man. The Christian life isn't just owning a study Bible. It's clothing ourselves in the righteous life of Christ and the new man.

It's not just playing the part of a nice Christian. it's devoting ourselves to vigilantly seek the face of God in prayer. And so prayer isn't just the next thing on his list of stuff to do as a Christian.

It's not the next thing on the list. It's actually how the whole list works. It ties all of Paul's previous instructions together if you think about it. Right?

Prayer is how 3 verse 1 works. prayer sets our minds on the things that are above because prayer is boldly approaching our Father's throne of grace by the power of the indwelling spirit on the basis of the Son's shed blood.

[8 : 28] That's what prayer is. Prayer is how 3 verse 5 works because prayer helps us kill sin. in Mark chapter 13 as Christ went to the garden to pray before he went to the cross he said that prayer would help keep his disciples from falling into temptation.

One writer said vigilant prayer provides the spiritual fortitude to face down temptation. Prayer is also how 3 verse 12 works.

we don't put on Christ's righteous life without looking to him without asking for his grace and his help and without the worship we give him in all of our prayer.

That gives us a lot of stuff to devote ourselves to prayer about doesn't it? all those things. I wonder is your prayer life stale?

Do you end up praying the same old things about the same old things every time you go to God in prayer? And does that dissuade you from praying frequently?

[9 : 47] I would recommend that you head back to those 3 sections. You have lots to pray about for yourself for your loved ones for your church family and there's something else he commands us to pray for.

He adds at the end here with thanksgiving now there is so much loaded into that phrase. we as Christians are thankful that the son even bought us the right to pray to the father the holy God we're thankful that he gave us the old testament prophets and the new testament apostles to give us his written word we're thankful that he gives us the church it's a gift to encourage to challenge to confront and build us up and most of all thankful for his cross and his empty tomb that's all the way back in chapter 1 verse 21 Paul explained that we were alienated and hostile in mind to God set against God by being set towards self and sin we were under his just eternal wrath but

Paul continued he has now reconciled us in his body of flesh by his death the king died in place of his rebellious subjects the one who was sinned against took the punishment due to the sinners themselves in order he says to present us holy and blameless and above reproach we were all sinners set for everlasting judgment with no way out but he chose to offer grace to all who would trust in his atoning death and his victorious resurrection so if you are joined to Christ by faith this above all drives your thankful prayer each and every night it is the key to being devoted to prayer no other motivation will sustain a lifetime of devoted prayer nothing can accept that and if you've never turned from sin and self to this loving savior to receive his grace as he receives you and extinguishes!

your sin on his cross to be reconciled to him to be brought into his family won't you right now won't you won't you this moment rely on him rely on his cross his empty tomb his promise today this very moment when we begin a life of thankfulness that spills over into active prayer and the gospel message that's the heart of this passage the gospel is for us that's the thankfulness that we have and then the rest of the passage is for the whole world verse 2 it drives us to vigilant thankful prayer in verses 3 and 4 Paul is driven into global missionary service and then in verses 5 and 6 it makes us wise and gracious missionaries so the gospel is for us for the whole world that's why Paul asks for prayer now Paul could have asked for prayer for a lot of things he could have asked he wore a lot of hats we'll say as an apostle so he had authority in the global church and as an apostle he could have asked for prayer for help in that role as an apostle his writings were specially authorized and empowered by the Lord for use as scripture he wrote much of the new testament including this letter he could have asked for prayers to that he had responsibilities in the local church wherever he went and he could have sought prayer for strength in that ministry he could have asked for prayer in his personal life and we'll get to that later but of all the places that Paul could have asked for prayer what was his chief concern in verse 3 at the same time pray also for us that God may open to us a door for the word to declare the mystery of Christ on account of which [15:15] I am in prison that I may make it clear which is how I ought to speak Paul asks in this moment for prayer in his role as a missionary he wants an open door not for himself not for his own advantage but for the word of Christ he wants to declare the mystery of Christ and get a hearing for that message because the gospel is for us and for the whole world now what mystery is he talking about it's not some secret knowledge he's talking about the gospel we just said we're thankful for he's already named the mystery back in chapter one one twenty-five I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you to make the word of God holy known the mystery that was hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to the saints to them

God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of his glory of this mystery which is Christ in you the hope of the Lord Paul became a minister of the gospel because the gospel is for us and for the whole world and he asks for prayer here in verses three and four in three specific areas first he asks for prayer that the Lord would open a door to proclaim the gospel next he mentions his obstacles he literally wrote this letter that we hold in our hands from prison and third he asks for grace to preach the gospel with clarity now Paul has already fought the good fight and finished his race so we can't really pray for him today the same way that the Colossian Christians his contemporaries could his final imprisonment was likely the one that he wrote this letter from and that ended with a soul he was beheaded for the cause of Christ and so we can't really pray for his missionary work today but that doesn't mean that we just read this remember his missionary ministry and then walk away from it and move on see when the Lord commissioned Paul as an apostle he said that Paul was a chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name Paul's missionary project did not end with Paul and still today the church commissions and sends missionaries all over the world to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ just like Paul where the Colossian Christians heard the message of this letter and were supposed to turn to God in prayer for Paul's missionaries we who hear this letter today need to turn to God in prayer for today's missionaries now if you look at the budget that Troyline as a church family passed only a month ago you'll see that we support missionaries globally through investing in the Southern Baptist Convention's cooperative program that funds the international mission and the North American mission but it's kind of hard for us to pray for a group of a thousand missionaries with any kind of specificity but anything but the most general terms now we shouldn't tire of that praying for all the missionaries everywhere but today I want to do something a little bit more

focused with you see our church family has a personal connection with one missionary in particular Brittany Lusa's father Randy Matthews is a missionary to several regions around the world and I love his ministry model he goes to places and he builds up leaders in the church to reach their own community all over the place I think that's a beautiful model especially in places where pastoral training is difficult to access or even non exist he preached at Shoreline last spring and he'll visit us again actually in two weeks he'll be in the pulpit really excited when Paul asked the Colossians to pray for him as a missionary I immediately thought of Randy as someone we could pray for in the same way so I asked him how we could pray for him in those same three areas here's how he responded so first the first area

[20 : 36] Paul asked for prayer the Lord would open a door for playing the gospel so I asked Randy what ways we could pray specifically for an open door for the word in his ministry he pointed out his work in Africa our vision he said is to train leaders in every country on the continent for church planning movements that will reach all people groups with the gospel pray for connections with key leaders second obstacles while Randy isn't imprisoned like Paul was I asked him how we could pray for the obstacles that he faces in his ministry one of the things he asked for was help with political obstacles he wrote many countries are closing their doors to Christians and Christian ministry please pray for India Nepal Indonesia and other places that are trying to wipe out any gospel witness in their lives also ask

God to give us wisdom and boldness in reclaiming the gospel to all people the third thing Paul requested grace for was to preach the gospel with clarity so I asked Randy how we could pray for clarity as he communicates to cultures across the world he ministers on three continents he asked for help with spiritual confusion he said Satan's passion is to keep people spiritually blinded to the gospel pray that the light of the gospel would shine revealing the glory of God in Jesus he also asked for prayer overcoming cultural differences God's desire is that every people group be reached with the gospel prayer pray that God would overcome all confusion caused by our different customs it's a particular joy for me when we get to in the midst of a sermon actually obey the word that is being proclaimed to us so I'm actually going to lead us right now in the middle of this sermon in this prayer after what

Paul asked for Randy so friends let's bow our heads let's actually put this into practice this month Father in heaven thank you that you have commissioned missionaries across the globe and one in particular whom we can serve and pray for and know his burdens thank you Lord for Randy and his missionary ministry to the world raising up leaders for your church to reach their own community Lord we ask for an open door to proclaim the gospel especially in Africa Lord where he and his colleagues are trying to reach every country to reach every people Lord will you give them connections with key leaders so that their work might be fruitful and multiplied across the whole continent Lord we also ask that in his burdens the obstacles that he faces

Lord will you reverse the course of those nations that would try to cut out gospel witness to their own people Father would you give missionaries like Randy wisdom and boldness to proclaim the gospel to all people and Lord we also pray for clarity of his mission Father will you keep people from being blinded spiritually to the gospel Lord would the light of the gospel shine revealing the glory of God in Jesus through his mission and Father would you help them to reach every group on three different continents would you help them overcome the language and cultural back of problems that set up barriers will you give them grace as they navigate these different customs so that they might make this message which is for us and for the world we pray these things for our joy and for his and for the name of Jesus amen now I actually had to trim

Randy's list out of love for our children's ministers if you would like to pray for Randy specifically well first off make sure you're here in two weeks because you can shake his hand and talk to him and ask him questions about his business but if you would like to see that whole list it's on the back table between build and sermon you can pick it up and put this passage into practice today now I want to point out something about Paul's request which I think is really strange perhaps the most surprising thing about this passage especially in verses 3 and 4 is what Paul does not ask for prayer what doesn't he pray for he does not say at the same time pray for me that I might get out of prison see that would probably top my list and I'm guessing it would top yours

[26 : 35] Paul's chief concern is Jesus and the good news about Jesus and those people whom he wishes to proclaim it to not his comfort or even his freedom or even his life he cares about giving the world the one piece of news Christ died and rose again for sinners the one piece of news that

can save them from an eternity of judgment and bring them into God's own house I wonder if I were in prison and I could get out a letter what would I ask for what would you ask for set me up a good fund me page so I can get a good lawyer pray that they'll that they forgot to read my

Miranda rights and I can get off on a technical what would make a prisoner plead not for help to escape but help to share the gospel there's only one thing only one thing can make people choose to joyfully disregard their own comfort only one thing can make people care about a cause more than their own safety only one thing can be worth more than freedom and life itself and that one thing is Jesus Christ himself Paul has seen the glory of the risen Christ it was quite literally blinding to him he knows that what no eye has seen nor ear heard nor the heart of man imagined that's what God has prepared for those who love him so he's practicing what he preached back in chapter 3 verse 1 he is seeking the things that are above where Christ is seated the joy of serving the risen Jesus is where this prayer comes from only the joy of this love will make a prisoner care about the gospel more than comfort or freedom or life itself so if you don't feel like this if I wouldn't pray like this and that's the heart we're going to need if we're going to live out verses 5 and 6 if we wouldn't pray like this I cannot simply instruct you to feel that way I can't I can't guilt you into it I can't trick you or manipulate you or cajole you in any way that would make you value the proclamation of the gospel and Jesus

Christ himself more than your own life I cannot do that I do not have that power if you don't treasure Jesus the way that Paul does if you don't value the spread of the gospel the way he does Christ needs your heart he needs to be your all in all and that only comes in one way it's a work of God in your heart that he does as you behold his glory and to see him as the all satisfying all sufficient lord of heaven!

all sufficient lord of heaven heaven and behold your heart his glory outshines the super no he breathed into existence his love is greater than any you will see in this life because he broke death to make you live don't just take my word for it he has spoken walk back to chapter one behold his glory see him for who he is and then recognize that that god bled and died on a roman cross for you see that that god robbed the grave for you consider how that god brought you new life and adopted you into his family maybe continue steadfastly in prayer being watchful in it that god would open up your heart to sing for him in joy and reconsider perhaps what we saw in chapter two where paul kept us from going off track if christ isn't your chief concern something else is either a lesser belief or a lesser way of life or a lesser treasure and it wasn't made to be your all in all and it cannot bear that right we need christ to be all in all like he is for paul once he is we're going to live our lives a particular way verses five and six tell us that we will walk in wisdom and speak with grace walk in wisdom towards outsiders paul says making the best use of the time let your speech always be gracious season with salt so that you may know how you ought to answer each person the apostle paul and missionaries like randy who follow in his footsteps have a global missionary task every christian has a local missionary task it's right here when paul tells us to walk in wisdom towards outsiders he's not saying beware of outsiders those outside the church be skeptical of them no he's going back to chapter one verse nine where he actually prayed at the very beginning for our wisdom and for our walk paul says we have not ceased to pray for you asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding so as to walk in a manner worthy of the

[34 : 34] Lord fully pleasing to him bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God so the wisdom friends that we are supposed to walk with towards those outside the faith is a spiritual wisdom that overflows that overflows with good works on the fruit of the spirit now how do we do that he says making the best use of the time or redeeming the time some of your translations might say when we hear that we probably think something like oh multitask right make sure that you're you know I listen to sermons while I run and those are good things but his focus here is a missionary not a make sure that you're filling up your spare time with spiritual things see we make the best use of our time when we walk in spiritual wisdom in a manner worthy of the Lord in front of our friends our neighbors and our peers as we go about our lives that's a work of gospel proclamation one

Puritan pastor put it like this in words that you will need interpretation for Christian graces being so exercised that they may be seen in their proper luster are excellent orators and have a mighty power to persuade what does that mean when we live holy lives that's Christian graces that's the Christian graces part and live like holiness is a delight rather than a reluctant duty that's seen in

their proper luster part that speaks volumes they're excellent orators and it makes people consider the God whom you serve that's why he says holy lives have a mighty power to persuade it makes a lot of sense think back to last week's sermon when all of what

Paul has commanded us in the book of Colossians has come to fruition our work and our homes look different and the world says wow your spouse treats you how where did you find her where did you find her oh well that's how Jesus wants us to live and that's how he loved us but our actions are not enough on their own Francis of Assisi never said preach the gospel at all times use words if necessary if you've heard that know that it's not actually something he said see the gospel is good news not good works so our actions give weight to our words but they never replace them and that is why Paul says in verse 6 let your speech always be gracious seasoned with salt so that you may know how you ought to answer each person we could probably park here and preach two or three servants on this just this one sentence in the spirit of what we saw in chapter three

I'm going to speak in two categories about this let us put to death ungracious speech and let us put on gracious speech first put to death ungracious speech I won't name names but someone at some church that happens to meet in a hotel in this very city he who has ears to hear let him hear was talking with me about evangelism we were talking about evangelism and he was confused why his co-worker wasn't really responding to the gospel so I asked him how the conversations were going he was taking an interest in his co-worker good he was trying to get to know him great he asked about what he liked to do and when the co-worker answered when he heard the hobby that consumed a lot of his time he laughed in his face that's right now that same puritan pastor said they who desire to be helpful in promoting the gospel must not unnecessarily provoke and exasperate those whom they would win over to it or my third class summer as a cadet

I was underway on a coast guard cut up on a port call I saw one of the crew members doing something that was immoral it wasn't illegal it was not against coast guard regs but it was sin and it was going to wound his wife and harm his marriage I asked him about it I don't remember the words that I used in the conversation it's more than 10 years ago now but I can still taste the condescending judgmental tone I used when I spoke to him about his sin he never once asked me about Jesus friend of sinners friends let's put to death ungracious speech and let's put on gracious speech first and most simply do people in your life know from your words that you have received grace the most basic level of seasoning your speech with the salt of the gospel is letting people know that you are a

[40 : 59] Christian if they had a spiritual question would they recognize that you know the one who is the answer doesn't need to be complicated doesn't need to be hard when people ask you what you do oh I work at electric boat and I serve in children's ministry at my church when people ask how your weekend was oh we went apple picking we had a great time at church do people in your life know that you've received grace that you're interested in the things of God and next does your speech actively give grace when was the last time you said I forgive you when was the last time you saw someone who was alone and in need of friendship and gave them the great gift of saying hi grace isn't complicated it's nothing and here's one of my favorites

I used it as much as I could when I worked in a secular workplace and you can use this anywhere ask someone have to do sometimes you'll get a surface level answer but sometimes someone will share something that's hard with you at home or at work or with their health and when they say this ask them hey I'm a Christian can I pray for you now I've had people be surprised at that but I've never had anybody saying no and sometimes you can tell that they're open to you actually praying for them in that moment and then a week or whatever is appropriate for the circumstance later say hey I have been praying for that thing you shared with me how is it going friends that shows so much grace and it opens up so many doors it is seasoned with salt now there are as many ways to season our speech with grace as there are conversations in the day

I can't possibly list them off so devote yourselves to prayer asking that you may be filled chapter 1 verse 9 with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord in this very thing friends Jesus left heaven to die alone on a cross for your sins and your salvation this message is for you and it is for the whole world will you out of a heart thankful for his grace devote yourselves to prayer will you pray you for the work of the gospel around the world and will you walk in wisdom and speak in grace friends let's pray oh lord our god who has given us grace beyond grace will you set our hearts on fire for you and for your gospel will you make us a people of prayer prayer that cares about the gospel cares about missionaries and

seeks to walk in wisdom and speak with the grace that you have shown us we pray that in christ's name amen would you stand before we enter into our time of healing we're going to take the voice to you