

Well, good morning; how are we? Good, good! I want to give a quick shout-out to my people joining us in our online community! I'm so glad you are a part of the Foothills Family and that you're with us in worship and studying God's Word from wherever and whenever you're at. Well, if I haven't been able to meet you, my name is Doug; I'm one of the Pastors here, and I would love to connect with you on the patio after we worship together. So, be sure to come and say hi.

We are closing up our series in the letter to the Colossians today! So if you've got your Bibles, which I hope you do, if you could open up with me to Colossians, chapter 4, that's where we'll be camping out.

Over the past several weeks, we've journeyed through Paul's letter to the Christians in Colossae. We've explored the profound theme of "Freedom in Christ." In Chapter 1, we marveled at the supremacy of Christ, recognizing Him as the image of the invisible God and the head of the Church. We understood that our freedom begins with acknowledging Jesus' preeminence in all things. That is, His supreme authority and exalted status above all that He has created and what it looks like to live in humble submission to this reality.

Moving into Chapter 2, we dug into the fullness of life in Jesus, where we learned about the spiritual freedom that comes from being rooted and built up in Him, rejecting false teachings and philosophies. And in, chapter 3 we were challenged to live out this freedom by setting our hearts and minds on things above, shedding our old selves, and embracing our new identity in Jesus. And, now, as we close up our series and dig into chapter 4...we are invited to uncover a vital aspect of our faith that is crucial to living out this freedom daily. This last element that

we're going to look at today is critical as it transforms the way we live and engage the world around us each day.

So, if you haven't grabbed your bible and pen yet, please do and open up with me to Colossians, chapter 4, we're going to be starting in verse 2.

**"2** Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

**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 I am in prison— **4** that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak."

Just before these verses, in Chapter 3, Paul was giving practical instructions on Christian living. This is what Pastor Brian walked us through last week as he explained that we have an opportunity do things different. As followers of Jesus, as Christians, we don't parent, work, husband or wife the way we used to or the way the world does. We have been freed from that darkness to now live out the light that is Jesus. We submit mutually to one another in marriage, we don't beat down our children over and over, we live in obedience. And if you remember Paul had emphasized the importance of letting the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, allowing the Word of Christ to dwell richly among us, and whatever we do, doing it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Now, here in Chapter 4, Paul transitions to a crucial aspect of sustaining and empowering this Christian lifestyle. Paul is fully aware that it is unnatural for us to be kind. To be patient. To be humble. To be generous. And so Paul explains what it is that we need to sustain and empower this Christian lifestyle: and that is prayer.

By instructing the Christians in Colossae to devote themselves to prayer, Paul underscores the need for constant communication with God, while being watchful and thankful. He knows that for the message of Jesus to be proclaimed effectively and for believers to live out their faith amidst the challenges and pain that is in life, a strong foundation of prayer is

essential. And, this shift to prayer is not just a call to personal devotion, but also a plea for communal support and intercession, or intervening through prayer on behalf of another person, and highlighting the interconnectedness of the body of Christ in advancing the gospel.

So, what does this look like? What does Paul calling Christians to do when he says, "devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful?" Well, it means making prayer a central and consistent part of daily life. It involves setting aside dedicated times each and every day to communicate with God, bringing before Him our thankfulness, our praises, yeah, and our needs and concerns. We don't often make time for this. But, we all know it and most of us feel super guilty about it! I would love to stand before you and tell you that I spend most of my days in prayer and solitude and that I am "one with Jesus" and basically, I don't even know what it's like to talk to mere humans anymore! Oh my gosh! No! It usually takes my wife going, "Well have you prayed?" Or, "we should probably pray over that." The reality is that this is an area, being devoted to prayer, that we could all improve.

Martin Luther was known for his dedication to prayer. He often spent significant time in prayer each day. He is famously quoted as saying, "I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer." This highlights Luther's belief in the critical aspect of prayer in the life of a Christian...especially in the midst of a busy schedule! Luther's commitment to spending these extended periods in prayer each morning demonstrates the depth of his reliance on God and the centrality of prayer in his life and ministry. And so we have to look inward and ask ourselves, are we that reliant on God? Is pray a central aspect of our life?

See, for the Christian, prayer is the vital connection that fuels our faith and sustains our spirit.

And so the reality is, we can't afford to live our lives each day without being devoted to communicating with the Triune God who is supreme over all creation and all circumstances.

So let's do things different. We are free in Jesus! We don't live by the world's time table. We're free from that! Instead, let's make the decision to make prayer a central and consistent part of our daily life. Setting aside times each and every day to communicate with God, bringing before Him our thankfulness, our praises, and our needs and concerns.

Friends, prayer isn't just a luxury; it's a necessity, especially amidst the busyness of life.

Now, this devotion involves more than just saying words; it requires us to be "watchful and thankful" as Paul says. Being watchful means staying spiritually alert and attentive to the needs of other people around us. It also means being attentive to the movement of God in our lives and the world around us. This vigilance helps us recognize opportunities to intercede for others and to see God's answers and guidance. Being thankful involves cultivating a heart of gratitude, consistently recognizing and expressing thanks for God's blessings, provisions, and faithfulness, even in the most difficult of times. This combination of dedication, watchfulness or alertness, and gratitude transforms prayer from a mere ritual, into a vibrant, life-giving practice that will deepen our relationship with God and impact our daily interactions and decisions.

Remember, prayer isn't just a luxury; it's a necessity.

As we cultivate this devoted, watchful, and thankful approach to prayer, Paul encourages us to not only pray for our own needs but also to lift up others in prayer. He continues in verse 3, saying, "

**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 I am in prison— **4** that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak."

Remember that Paul is writing this letter from prison in Rome, where he is because he's been going around sharing the Gospel of Jesus in everything he does. This a situation that might seem hopeless to many people, if not just intimidating and terrifying. But Paul, I love this, instead of asking for the Christian's in Colossae to prayer for his release or personal comfort, or that they wouldn't kill him, Paul's primary concern is for the advancement of the gospel!

So, he asks the Christians to pray that God would open doors for him to proclaim the message of Jesus...even while in chains! This reveals Paul's unwavering commitment to his mission of spreading the gospel, even in the most challenging, painful, hopeless, circumstances.

Even in prison, Paul sees potential for ministry and is asking for divine intervention to create opportunities where none seem apparent. Friends, Paul asking for prayer in this situation emphasizes the belief that God is sovereign and capable of turning even dire situations, horrible circumstances into moments for His glory. So, whether school is your prison. Or your job is your prison. Or being in Walmart. We have an opportunity. And so we need to not only be praying and communicating with the Father about our own lives, but we need to be praying for our employees. Our children's while they're at school, or with friends, or the people in our family here serving and leading.

Paul also mentions the "mysterious plan concerning Christ." This refers to the mystery of the gospel, which was hidden for ages but has now been revealed through Jesus. In Colossians 1:26-27, Paul describes this mystery as "Christ in you, the hope of glory." What Paul is pointing towards here is the reality that God's redemptive plan for humanity has been made possible through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It includes the inclusion of Gentiles, those who are not Jewish, into God's covenant promises, which was a totally revolutionary concept at the time. And this is what Paul wants prayer for. That he would boldly proclaim this reality.

And I love verse 4 where Paul asks, "Pray <sup>4</sup> that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak." This shows Paul's desire to communicate the gospel effectively and understandably. Paul was super intelligent. He had a ton of knowledge and experience, but he recognizes his dependence on God to convey the message of Jesus with clarity and power. This humility and reliance on prayer is as an example for you and me, reminding us that our efforts to share the gospel should always be grounded in prayer, asking Jesus for His guidance and strength.

Now, as Paul continues in his letter, he shifts our focus from our internal spiritual life to how we interact with the world around us. In verses 5 and 6, he speaks to the importance of wisdom in our conduct, particularly towards those who don't know Jesus yet. Check out verse 5 and 6,

<sup>5</sup>Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. <sup>6</sup>Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

I really like how the New Living Translation words verse 5. It's a bit more clear and simple for me. It reads this way, "<sup>5</sup>Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity."

When Paul is telling Christians to "live wisely among those who are not believers", he is emphasizing the need for our conduct to reflect Jesus' character in all of our interactions. Living wisely means being intentional about how we present ourselves and our faith to the world. It involves demonstrating integrity, humility, and love in a way that attracts others to Christ rather than pushing them away.

And I know that people can take this idea of loving in an attractive way and think that we have to compromise our beliefs, or we have to "hide" the uncomfortable stuff. And that's not the case at all. It's all in the delivery.

My dog had an infection recently. I think he recognized something wasn't right. But he just went along with his life. And so I did the loving thing, this beautiful Siberian Wooly Husky with his long thick hair...I had to shave it off and expose the wound underneath. Then, I had to give him antibiotics for 10 days.

Shaving that hair was the most loving thing I could do. But it hurt...It physically hurt him, but it hurt me too. You should see how goofy this dog looks! And he wouldn't eat the anti-biotics...but the loving thing to do was to help him swallow it. So, I put it with his food it was less painful.

Attractively loving people doesn't equate to compromising.

Wisdom begins with a deep reverence for God and a commitment to His Word. Proverbs 9:10 says, **10** "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight."

This means that our wisdom should be rooted in our relationship with Jesus and guided by Scripture. So, we need to look at how Jesus interacted with people. We need to read the Scriptures and grow in our knowledge of Him. We need to open communication by being devoted to praying, talking to Him. Then we will grow in wisdom that will guide our decisions and our interactions.

Friends, we live wisely, love deeply, and share boldly.

So what does that look like? What does living wisely, loving deeply, and sharing boldly in the context of impacting non-believers look like?

**Living in Integrity:** Being honest and trustworthy in all your dealings, whether personal or professional. Proverbs 11:3 says, "The integrity of the upright guides them, but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them." When we live with integrity, we build trust and credibility, which opens doors for sharing the gospel. That's living wisely.

**Being Compassionate and Kind:** Reflecting Jesus's love through acts of kindness and compassion. Remember Colossians 3:12? Paul calls Christians to "put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience." Simple acts of kindness can make a profound impact on non-believers and it can pique their curiosity, why is this person different than all the others? That's living wisely.

**Engaging in Thoughtful Conversations:** Every conversation you have is an opportunity to share the hope that we have in Jesus, with gentleness and respect. 1 Peter 3:15 advises us, "in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect." This means listening actively and responding thoughtfully. That's living wisely.

**Making the Most of Every Opportunity:** We are to Recognize and seize opportunities to share our faith, whether through words or actions. Ephesians 5:15-16 says, "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." This requires us to be spiritually alert, watchful and ready to act when God presents an opportunity to be patient, to be generous, to be kind, to be bold, to be Jesus in that moment. That's living wisely.

As we close out our series in the letter to the Colossians, where we've been looking at the freedom we have in Christ, it is so important to remember that this freedom we now have as believers in Jesus is the foundation that we build off of. It's our freedom in Christ to live as "new creations, the old is gone and the new has come!" And so this freedom we have in Jesus influences our prayers, how we live, and our life mission.

And it was from this theme of "Freedom in Christ" that Paul is urging us to devote ourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. This call to being



devoted to prayer is freedom in Christ, because we are no longer bound by the limitations of sin and separation from God. Instead, we have direct access to the Father, allowing us to approach Him with confidence and assurance. This freedom transforms our prayer life from a mere obligation because of our sinfulness, into a vibrant, ongoing conversation with the Triune God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This freedom empowers us to be watchful, staying alert to God's movements and the needs of those around us, and not distracted by the things of the world. It frees us to be thankful, recognizing and celebrating the abundant blessings we receive through Christ. Not looking at ourselves as gods, as though we are the providers of all we have. But, rightfully, seeing God as sovereign.

When Paul asks for prayers for himself he's revealing another aspect of this freedom. Even while he is in chains, Paul understands that his circumstances do not define his ability to fulfill his mission. His freedom in Christ transcends his physical imprisonment, allowing him to focus on the opportunity to proclaim the gospel. And not be distracted by his circumstance.

He asks the Colossians to pray for open doors to share the mystery of Christ. This mystery, revealed through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, is the glorious truth that both Jews and Gentiles are now reconciled to God. Our freedom in Christ compels us to support one another in prayer, knowing that God can turn any situation, no matter how dire, into an opportunity for His glory.

This freedom enables us to live with integrity, humility, and love, reflecting the character of Jesus in our daily interactions. It frees us from the fear of judgment and rejection, allowing us to engage others with genuine kindness and respect, with a desire to please God alone, and no one else.

Friends, our freedom in Christ equips us to be spiritually alert and ready to act when God presents moments to share His love and truth. It means our speech should always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so we may

know how to answer everyone. This graciousness is a direct result of the grace we have received through Jesus. We are free to extend that same grace to others, demonstrating the transformative power of the gospel in our lives.

The freedom we have in Jesus is the driving force behind our devotion to prayer, our support for one another, and our wise and gracious interactions with the world. It liberates us to live out our faith authentically and boldly, making a profound impact on those around us. So, live in this freedom fully, allowing it to shape our prayers, our conduct, and our witness, as we live wisely, love deeply, and share boldly, reflecting the hope and glory of Christ in all we do.

Let's do life different. Let's do it being Free in Christ!

Let's Pray.