

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

10.18.2026 | Steadfast in Prayer | Colossians 2:4-6 | Dr. Ben Day, Senior Pastor

you have a Bible this morning, Colossians chapter four is where we're going to be. I would love for you to take a copy of God's word and turn there with us so that you can see the words in the Bible as we study them together. I mentioned earlier we are in the last week of a five-week series that we've been walking through that is helping us to focus on this mission that we have been called to. We are sent to be witnesses to Jesus right here in our Jerusalem of San Francisco. Next week we're going to be back in the book of Acts as we continue to see how God, the spirit, the word work through the church and continues to work through the church today. But in this series we've just been trying to consider how we've been sent. We've looked at how God has sent us out as a God who pursues the lost. We've seen that we've been called to bring people to Jesus. Over the last couple of weeks we've looked even more into how that looks like, what that looks like, how we do that, how we share the gospel in a post-Christian culture, how we work and live as exiles in this world.

And I hope that this series has been motivating to you to live as a witness. I hope it's been equipping to you to just think about how do we do this. But one thing that I recognize is that much of the focus has been on us, our calling, our responsibility, what we are supposed to do in this mission. I think it's important for us to hear those things and to consider our calling and our responsibility, but at the same time I don't want us to end with just a focus on us. This morning I want to, as we end the series, underscore a really important truth, and that is that God is sovereign. God is sovereign. He is over all things, including salvation. God loves lost people far more than we could ever fathom. God has a mission that he is carrying out and he will complete that mission. Yes, we have a responsibility. We have been called to share the gospel. We have been called to carry out this mission, to be involved in what he is doing, but our hope is not in ourselves. Our hope is in God. Our hope is in the fact that he is the one who saves. And because that is true, we need to keep turning to him in prayer.

This morning I want to close our series with an exhortation that Paul uses to close his letter to the church in Colossae, and that is that we would be steadfast in prayer, that as we even move away from these five weeks of prayer and fasting that we've been doing over the course of the week, we would continue to seek God in prayer as we continue to live as witnesses. And so Colossians chapter 4, I just want to read a few verses. As Paul comes to the end of this letter to the church in Colossae, he's been kind of giving them instructions on how they live as followers of Christ. And he says here in this passage that they are to continue steadfastly in prayer, and then he shows them or explains to them kind of what that looks like.

So let me just read to you Colossians chapter 4, verses 2-6. Paul tells the church continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. 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 toward 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.

How you approach prayer will be shaped by how you approach life. What you think about prayer will be shaped by what you think about life. This is kind of the central argument that John Piper made one time in a book and a sermon that has always kind of stuck with me. Basically, John Piper said that many of us live as if we are in peace time. When you're in peace time, your main focus is usually on your comforts, your securities, how you can just kind of make your life better. He said that because most of us live as if we are in peace time, we approach prayer in this way. We pray for these sorts of things. But he made an argument from scripture that you can really see much of life as being at war. Not that all of life is just simply a battle. I mean, there's victory in Jesus, there's rest, there's joy. Life is not only war, but you can see in scripture that we don't necessarily just live in peace time.

Ephesians 6 tells us that there is this battle that we are involved in, a spiritual battle which we wrestle against, not flesh and blood, but spiritual powers and authorities. We have an armor that we need to put on. When you think about this calling that we have, to be sent out, to be witnesses to Jesus, it is to be involved in this mission of rescuing people

from the enemy. There is a wartime kind of mentality here. And when you have that mentality for life, then it's going to change the way that you approach prayer. John Piper said that for many of us, prayer malfunctions because we use it as an intercom to call our heavenly butler and tell him what we need. When really, prayer should be viewed much more like a wartime walkie-talkie, in which we reach out to our general and call for covering because we're about to go into an area. I don't think most of us approach prayer in this way. I know I don't. I'm guessing maybe you don't either. I mean, I just wonder, even over these five weeks in which we've kind of been challenging ourselves, to be more intentional and focused in our prayer lives, to even fast at times that we might pray. How many of us have prayed with this type of urgency, as if we're in the midst of a battle?

My hope is that as we end this series, as we move away from an intentional time of praying and fasting, that our prayer lives would not begin to dim, but would only continue to grow. My hope is that even as we move away from an intentional time of looking at how we've been called to be witnesses to Jesus, our living in that mission would not begin to dim, but would only continue to grow. In other words, I hope that this series has only been a catalyst for us, and that the end of the series has not some ending point to us seeking God in prayer or living on mission for him, but it would just be a beginning point of us doing that anew in this season. Paul ends his letter to the church in Colossae saying, "You need to continue steadfastly in prayer, and this is what I want to call us to as well." As we see that we are in the midst of a spiritual battle, we would continue steadfastly in prayer.

Paul unpacks this idea of what is he calling the people to, the church to. He has told them that Jesus is sufficient in the first half of the letter. Now he has spent the second half of the letter saying, "Here's how you are devoted to this sufficient Jesus." Now he says, in the closing words, "This is how you continue in that by continuing steadfast in prayer." And he breaks it down, I think, into three parts that I just want to lay before you this morning. First, I think he says that we must pray persistently. We must pray persistently. He says, "Continue steadfast in prayer." The focus there isn't so much on how is, intense your prayer times, but rather how consistent are your prayer times. While it is good to have intentional times in which you seek to focus God for a day, for a week, for a season, his focus isn't so much about how intense are your prayer times, but rather how consistent is your prayer life. He tells them, "Continue steadfastly in prayer."

And I think he says that when you do this, a couple of things will happen in you. Firstly, as you pray persistently, you will stay alert in prayer. One of the reasons that we need to pray persistently to continue steadfast in prayer is that this type of prayer helps us to stay alert. First Paul says here to stay watchful. Go to verse two. At the beginning of this he says, "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it." This word that we translate watchful in the English language, it really means to be alert or to be awake. There's probably some sense in which Paul is saying that they need to stay awake until the second coming of Christ, that they need to not fall asleep and that prayer helps them to stay alert as they wait for Christ's return. But even as he goes next into praying for the gospel to be shared, for him to be able to speak clearly, there's a missional component to it.

In fact, one commentator, one scholar of the Book of Colossians said that he seems to be saying that being prayerful allows them to be mindful of the circumstances of life that contribute to the spread of the gospel. Being prayerful helps us to stay alert. I think sometimes we live as if we are in peacetime because we've become very unaware of the fact that we are living in the midst of a war. We fall asleep. We don't stay alert. I mentioned a few weeks ago, I think sometimes we're kind of apathetic when it comes to evangelism because we don't think about the great need that each person has. If we can really see the eternal state of each person, if we can really see what awaits them if they continue on their path, I think we would have a little bit more urgency in being witnesses to Jesus to them.

The same way, I think we would have a bit more urgency if we were alert and awake to what is truly happening around us, how important this mission is. Being prayerful helps you to stay alert to those true realities. When you go to God in prayer, I believe he changes your perspective to see the things you would have normally missed. Allow your regular prayer times to be like alarms that wake you up again to the true reality of life. In fact, maybe use alarms to help you to remember to be consistent in your prayer life. I tell you, lately I've started using more alarms on my phone to just remind me to pray. I know as a pastor I'm supposed to be like, have just a super vibrant prayer life and I don't need those types of reminders, but I struggle with it just like you do. Set reminders to yourself. Do what you need to do to stay persistent in prayer.

Because as you stay persistent in prayer, you will stay alert to the battle that you are in. You'll stay alert to the lost people who are around you. You'll stay alert to the God whom we serve, who loves the people who are around you. Use prayer to wake yourself up, to stay watchful, to stay alert. But secondly, we pray persistently not just to stay alert, but also to stay grateful. We're able to stay alert in prayer, but we're also able to stay grateful in prayer. All throughout the letter to the Colossians, if you were to read it, Paul, one of his consistent themes is that they would give thanks. And he says the same thing right here in verse two whenever he calls them to be steadfast in prayer.

It says, continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. There's something about prayer that allows us to get a new perspective and give thanks to God. I know earlier we were using the metaphor that prayer is like this wartime walkie talkie. I think John Piper uses that illustration just to try to show the urgency, the fervency of prayer. But I don't think we're supposed to just view prayer as purely utilitarian, as if we only pray to get the things we need from God. Praying is about communing with God. When we commune with him, we are communing with our Heavenly Father, but we're also communing with the commander of the armies of angels. We are calling out to him with what we need, but we are also spending time with him, knowing his heart. When you spend time with God in prayer, I believe you'll be far more grateful. Other times in Scripture, Paul tells us, bring everything to God in prayer with thanksgiving.

There's something about coming to God in prayer that just changes our perspective. We're able to give thanks for things that we would have normally complained about. Sometimes when you seek to live on mission for God, seek to be his witness, it will feel overwhelming. It will feel discouraging. At times you'll experience opposition or rejection. Maybe sometimes it won't even be that specifically, but you just won't see the fruit that you'd love to see. You keep praying for somebody, you keep sharing with somebody, and yet their life is not changing. They're not believing in Jesus. Sometimes we could become cynical, we could become discouraged. Continuing to go to God in prayer helps us to stay grateful, to reflect on our own salvation, to remember that we were saved only because of God's grace towards us, to give him thanks, to remember that we're only involved in this mission because God has invited us into by his grace. Sometimes we think about being in this mission, we think of it like this burden that we have to do.

Every week, Pastor Ben tells me I need to be telling somebody about Jesus, and another week I haven't done it, and we just kind of feel bad about ourselves. But what if we just went to God and thanked him for allowing us to be involved in this work that he is doing, of rescuing people from the enemy. I think about it even with church work, or we think about the firehouse as we've been praying over that. Sometimes I think about this work that we have before us, and I get overwhelmed. I get kind of burdened. I think, man, it's going to take so many people, so much of my time, it's going to be so much effort to reach people in our own neighborhood. But if I go to God in prayer, my perspective shifts. I'm thankful that we have space in the city of San Francisco to use to share the gospel. I'm thankful that we have people in this church that I get to be a part of this church, and the work that God has called us to.

Going to God in prayer regularly changes our perspective. It makes you alert to things that you would have normally been apathetic about. It makes you grateful for things you might have normally grumbled about. Go to God persistently, consistently, in prayer. We'll help you be watchful. We'll help you to give thanks. It's the attitude in which we continue in prayer. But then Paul says, "Here's what you should be praying for." So as we pray persistently, we should be praying missionally. This is the second part of what I think Paul kind of lays out for the church here. He says you pray with this attitude that would lead you to be persistent, consistent in your prayer lives. But then you go with this focus on the mission that God has that he has called you into. That your prayer is not just on yourselves or your own comforts or securities as if you're living in peacetime, but your focus is on rescuing people from the enemy, seeing this mission carried out. Pray missionally. And specifically, Paul says, pray for two things. One, pray for open doors.

As we pray for this mission to be carried out in our lives, as we pray missionally, we pray for open doors. We pray for opportunities. We pray for conversations. Paul requests this prayer for himself, for the people that he is serving with. He says, you pray, continue steadfastly and pray for yourselves, but then also pray for us. Verse three, 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. Paul says, yes, pray for yourself, but also pray for others. Pray for others in this church. Pray for other Christians in other churches. Pray for missionaries that have been sent out. What are you praying for? You're praying for an open door, opportunities for the gospel to be shared.

Think about how focused on the mission Paul is. Paul tells us, he reminds us here, he's in prison as he writes this letter. And instead of praying that the prison door would be open, Paul is praying that a door would be open for the gospel to be shared. Rather than wanting to see his circumstances change for his own benefit, Paul is praying that the circumstances would be conducive to the spread of the gospel. When is the last time this was your prayer request? When was the last time this is what you prayed for someone else? Yes, we should be praying for people's health. We should be praying for the challenges they face. We should be praying for all of their life because it's all important to God. But how often do we pray that God would open up doors for you, for someone else to share the gospel? Paul prays, he says, pray that the opportunities would come. And I think that if we would spend the time praying for these opportunities, we would actually see how many opportunities are before us. Just like we're so often, I think, blind to the spiritual battle that we are in, I think so often we are missing opportunities because we never spent the time seeking God in prayer, asking him for those opportunities.

I think of an example of a mission trip I was on one time. On this mission trip, each morning we would do a devotion. And in that devotion, we would just kind of look briefly into God's Word. And one of the questions we would ask is, how would you share this truth from Scripture with someone who's not yet a Christian? And so one morning we were doing the parable of the four soils, when the seed is scattered on four different types of soil. And one of the people on the team said, you know, to be honest, I don't think I would use this passage to speak to a non-Christian. I think I would choose a different place of Scripture. They said, okay, well, let's just think about how would we do it. So we talked about it. Well, later that day we were at a community center where we would often try to meet people. And we were standing outside the community center, and a man from the Middle East was there. An older man in his broken English, he just made a comment on how plants would just grow out of the cracks and the bricks and the concrete.

How interesting it was to see plants grow in different places. And I just gave this guy on our team a glance. And he said, okay. And he just went in. He said, you know, it reminds me of this story that I was reading this morning. He would have never seen that opportunity if we didn't talk about it that morning. There are opportunities before each one of us each and every day that we are missing. Because we don't start with prayer saying, God, open up a door. God is opening up doors all around us and we're not seeing them. Would you pray for yourself and for others that God would open up a door? But then also, would you pray that they would actually walk through that open door? And here's the second part. So we pray for open doors, but we also pray for clear words. Pray that God would give opportunities for us to share the gospel. And then we pray that God would actually give us the ability to clearly share the gospel.

Paul says, pray that a door would be open that we might declare the mystery of Christ. He says, it is a mystery. So I want you to pray this in verse four. Pray that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. Paul recognizes that it is a mystery to all people. Salvation by faith in Christ. It is something that is not easily comprehended. He says, pray that I would have the words to make it clear. Paul is a seasoned missionary. If he is asking for prayer for clarity and sharing the gospel, how much more should we ask for that prayer? Ephesians six, as he talks about the spiritual battle, he says, pray that I might have boldness. If Paul, who is stoned and run out of town and all these things is asking for prayer for boldness, how much more should we?

Let's pray for open doors, but let's also pray that God would give us clear words. And just think about that for a moment. Pray that God would give us words. If we're going to be witnesses to Jesus and tell people the good news of Jesus, it's going to require us to speak. And I'm preaching to myself here because so many times I go out wanting to look for open doors, and I never actually say anything to anybody. If we're going to proclaim the gospel, yes, it needs to be shown with all of our lives, but we're going to actually have to speak the words of the gospel. We're going to tell people about Jesus and about what he's done in our lives. Pray that God would give us words to say, but also pray that those words would be able to make the gospel clear.

Paul says here, it's the mystery of Christ. A couple of weeks ago, Pastor Clark was helping us think about how challenging it can be sometimes to share the gospel in our culture today. How do you tell somebody about salvation if they don't even believe in sin? How do you tell somebody about a God who loves them? They don't think there's anything outside of this material universe. It can be challenging to share the gospel. It's only with the Holy Spirit's guidance that we can do it. Rather than just always trying to do better ourselves, let's go to God in prayer. Let's pray that God would give us opportunities, and let's pray that by the power of His Spirit we'd be able to use those opportunities to speak the words

of the gospel in a way that people can understand. Let's pray persistently. Let's pray missionally, and let's actually then live it out. So the last part of this is to actually live sinned.

Again, this is something we've tried to say throughout this series, but it's just something I want to underscore here. Prayer should never leave us to be passive. If we're going to God in prayer, it should not replace our efforts of being a witness. It should only fuel them. We should be driven out of our prayer closets, onto the streets, to share of what we've just been considering in our prayer lives. Live sinned. In two ways that Paul describes this and will be done. First, live wisely. Paul, as he has just called the church to continue steadfastly in prayer and to pray for him in the advancement of the gospel, he then says, "Now live this out." He tells him in verse 5, "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time."

Earlier in this letter, Paul prayed that they might have wisdom. Now he is telling them to walk in that wisdom. Specifically, he says, "Walk in wisdom towards those who do not yet know Christ." So many times we ask for prayers for wisdom, but it's because we're trying to make a decision about our career. We're trying to decide how we manage things. Paul says, "You do need wisdom, but a primary way you need wisdom is in how do you treat people? How do you act amongst people? Walk in wisdom toward those who are around you that don't yet know Christ." He describes it by making the best use of time. Literally in the Greek he says, "buying back the time" or redeeming the time.

What I think he is saying is, be intentional with each moment God gives you. Last week, Paul Taylor was here and he was helping us to think about living and working as exiles. Sometimes when we think about being exiles, we might think about, "This world is not our home." We can start to think that what we do here doesn't really matter. We can start just thinking, "Man, I just can't wait until I get to heaven." Thinking about our time here as just a waiting room before we get to go spend eternity with God. Paul says, "Don't think about your time here on earth that way. Rather, think about how you can best redeem the time. Live wisely. Make the best use of your time. Let every aspect of your life be a picture of the gospel.

Do you live and work in such a way that people can trust you? Do you treat people with patience and kindness so that they might see Christ in you? Are you curious to get to know people, show them the God who knows them and loves them? Make the best use of each moment. Being a witness, living on mission, is not just about those exact times when we get to share the gospel. Yes, it's important that we have clear words when the door is open, but it's also just about everyday moments of life. Let's start using our time a little bit more wisely. Let's stop spending our time on things that won't matter in a year or in ten years or especially in eternity. Think about the eternal investments that you are making. Who are you sharing with? Who are you discipling? How can we use our time more effectively for eternal matters? How can we do that in every area of life? How can we do that as we serve here at the church? How can you make the best use of time? How can we redeem time in the firehouse? As we open a door there for people to come in, hopefully meet God. Live wisely.

And then lastly, speak winsomely. Speak winsomely. Now I'll admit, I use the word winsomely because it also starts with a W and I kind of like just the alliteration. But I do think it also actually kind of describes what Paul is speaking about here in verse six. I think to be winsome means to be persuasive. Tell people not just hear what's true, but also help them to believe why it would be good for it to be true. When I hear the word winsome, I often think of Tim Keller who was in New York and actually towards the end of his life, he got critiqued for being too winsome in our hostile culture. One thing that Tim Keller used to say is that you shouldn't just try to show that Christianity is true, but you should speak in such a way that people would love for Christianity to be true and then show them that it's true.

In other words, you don't just need to have kind of historical arguments as to why you could believe Jesus rose from the dead, or scientific arguments to show why there's a creator, an intelligent design. But show people why it is good to know that there is a creator who intentionally made you, who has a plan for this world. Show them why there is hope, the fact that all things are going to be made new. Why there is hope and that there's a living Savior who takes away our shame and our guilt, and then show them that all that we long for in those things is actually true. I think Paul is saying here, you can speak winsomely. Verse six, "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." The words that we say should be gracious words. That doesn't mean we never disagree with anybody. We never tell somebody why we think differently than them. In fact, he ends this verse by saying,

"You've got to give an answer." I think that shows some level of disagreement. At some point, you're going to have to speak the truth, but he says, "Let that truth be covered in grace. Let your words be kind towards people." It says, "Seize in them with salt."

It's hard to know exactly what that means. Salt was the main seasoning that they used back then, so it just seems like he's saying, "Be intentional about the words that you use." Jesus told us to be the salt. There was something kind of in rabbinic teaching at that day that to season with salt meant to use wisdom. Maybe that's why Paul says, "So that you might be able to give an answer." We don't exactly know, but it seems really clear here that we are to speak in grace and in truth. Speak the truth in love. Yes, let people know what is true about Christianity, but also make them want to believe that it is true. By how you live your life, by how you speak about the goodness of God. We live wisely. We speak winsomely, all recognizing that none of that can actually save people.

What I need you to know is that you can't actually ever be winsome enough to bring someone to salvation. You can't let your speech be so gracious. You can't have the perfect answer in such a way that someone will be saved. God is sovereign over salvation. We can only plant. We can only water. God is the only one who can give the growth. But at the same time, know that God uses your planting and your watering to give growth. He uses your imperfect planting and your imperfect watering as well. When we waste time, God redeems the time. When we make mistakes and live foolishly, God uses our foolishness to show off his wisdom. When our words aren't gracious, God's grace is sufficient. Our hope is not in our ability to be winsome enough, to live wisely enough. Our hope is in God to work through our failed attempts by the power of his Spirit when we seek him to accomplish his great plan. That should drive us to our knees in prayer. Continue steadfastly in prayer.