

Good morning, Church! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Colossians 4:2-6.

Before we read the text, I want you to write down three names.

1. Your name: _____.
2. The name of someone within our church body: _____.
3. The name of someone outside of our church. _____.

The purpose of this exercise is to remind us that:

1. You and I need to hear the Gospel afresh this morning.
2. Someone else in our Church *needs* to hear the Gospel through you.
3. There are those around us who are desperate for the Gospel.

The hope is that we would draw each of these people with us through this sermon in prayer. That we might even move toward them later this week as we gather ideas while listening, and seek to build them up after you have been built up by the word.

I will now read Colossians 4:2-6, and then we will pray together. This is our second-to-last sermon in Colossians. We are going to be focusing on verses 5-6, but we will also read and look at verses 2-4 because they are *deeply* connected to where we are going today.

Let's hear God's word.

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.

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

Heavenly Father, we come before you in prayer this morning in order to express our gratitude to you. You created the heavens and earth and everything in them by the power and authority of your word. You sent Jesus as the Word so that you might be known (John 1:18), and even though we have never seen you, we love you (John 20:29) because your word has come alive in us. You breathed out the word in the Scriptures to make us wise for salvation (1 Tim. 3:14-15). All we want this morning is to gaze upon your beauty in the temple (Psalm 27:4). Thank you for giving us your word. We pray that you would make us more like Jesus through

it. Use your word to accomplish your will in our hearts. We open our hearts to you now.

Jesus, thank you for being the complete and perfect embodiment of this text. You are *not* asking us to do anything that you have not already done in your life, death, burial and resurrection. We thank you that all obedience is a Gospel call to fellowship with the living Christ, who is seated at the right hand of the throne in heaven. Jesus you are wise. Gracious. And, true. Cause us to be obedient to you out of the overflow of our nearness to you in personal joy and admiration. Jesus, we love you.

Holy Spirit, we ask that you would give us the strength "...to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:18-19). Impress upon us the weight and magnitude of knowing God. Change us from the inside out. Unite us in an ever-deepening fashion with the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. We pray this together in Jesus' name, amen.

I want to begin by stating this simple point: Jesus is prayerful, wise, and seasoned by grace. Do you agree? That would be very easy to prove by a quick read of the Gospels.

On the other hand, we are prayerless, graceless fools. Do you agree? It would take just a 24 hour walk through one of our days to prove this point.

Do we want to be devoted to prayer, to live wisely before outsiders, and season all our speech with grace? Then, we must look to Jesus.

I want to remind us of this very important truth: "...We come to know God best not by looking at God exclusively, but by looking at God and then looking at ourselves—then looking at God, and then again looking at ourselves." We must remember the Gospel:

God Saves Christians into Prayerful, Wise, and Seasoned Lives to the glory of God through the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

The commands (as we will see in a moment) of the New Testament are an invitation to joyful obedience, not moralistic self-loathing. Jesus is *not* interested in beating you up to be better you, or in you beating anyone else up to be a better them. He is interested in saving and sanctifying sinners through the joyful experience of trusting him. This sermon is *not* about your improvement *mainly*, it's about God.

God saves sinners. God saves sinners from sin. And he saves sinners from sin and into his righteousness by grace through faith. Grace and faith are a free gift, but they also come with commands.

The aim of this sermon is to explain how three commands (to pray, be wise, and gracious) are inextricably linked in the Christian life to God himself. Once we see the connections, we will seek to weave them into our own Christian lives.

To briefly illustrate all three of these characteristics, Proverbs 24:30-34 depicts two men. One wise, the other foolish. The writer says,

I passed by the field of a sluggard,
by the vineyard of a man lacking sense,
and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns;
the ground was covered with nettles,
and its stone wall was broken down.
Then I saw and considered it;
I looked and received instruction.
A little sleep, a little slumber,
a little folding of the hands to rest,
and poverty will come upon you like a robber,
and want like an armed man.

What a powerful image. One man is alert, awake, walking, meditating, praying, observing, thinking, and even composing riddles to make his insights memorable. He is leaning forward in his life. He has clear judgment, discernment, and he is open to reason. "He receives instruction." He has an open mind. He is wise. And, he captures his thinking for his own benefit as well as for generations to come. Well done.



The other man, the sluggard, is being lulled to sleep. He's drowsy and snoring.

He's dozing through life. Based on the status of his field, it seems obvious that this is a pattern. Each day he gets up to say, "I'll deal with this tomorrow, not today." Then, he watches YouTube videos until he falls asleep again. He settles into rest, hands folded. Slowly but surely, poverty climbs over his broken walls, into his unkempt field, and takes advantage of this sleeping sluggard like a robber.

His life is ripped from him with ease.

While this Proverb is applied to economic poverty, its principle is universal. Personal *laziness* brings about spiritual, emotional, psychological, and intellectual poverty. Because of sin, we are born into, and we perpetuate unkempt fields of unresolve, or places of poverty, all over our lives because, in our sinfulness, we would rather fold our hands than roll up our sleeves and walk with God.

We are all sluggardly. Jesus, on the other hand, is the sage. He is wise. He is gracious. He is prayerful.

Our lack of spiritual growth, depth with God, and connection to others is directly related to our own inability to wake up spiritually. Passing by your life and mine would be an exposition of spiritual poverty.

So, God rescues sinners into prayerful, wise, and seasoned lives to the glory of God. He does this through Jesus.

The sage in Proverbs 24 is open to grace. "He *receives* instruction" by grace. The posture of his heart is not moralistic, self-effort. It's the joyful welcoming of God's reality. He is inviting God to instruct him in a posture of humility.

The sluggard is found ignoring God. The wise man sees that God is missing. One author writes, "God is of all missing persons the most missed, except that [missing him] comes not as an ally of darkness but as its adversary, not as a symptom of darkness but as its antidote." By missing him, He is searching for him and acknowledging his reality. Another author writes, "Sin is trying to succeed by ignoring reality." Doesn't that sound like all of us?

We all want to coast with hands folded into an intimate relationship with God, others, and ourselves, but we are blocked by our own foolishness. We falter and fail in prayer. We slip and stumble in our relationships. We speak and say the wrong things at all the wrong times. "Who will rescue us from our bodies of death?" (Romans 7).

We are limping through life in weakness and wandering. Some of us as pilgrims are sleeping along the roadside. And yet, Jesus comes to us, and he is compelled to save us for his own glory.

Jesus shows us a better way. He alone is prayerful, wise, and seasoned by grace. And, he saves us into his life by commanding us to walk with him.

If you read the book of Colossians in one sitting, you can see that it is saturated with prayerful, wise, and seasoned words.

Paul models his prayer life by saying, "We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you..." (Col. 1:3), and "...*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..." (Col. 1:9). Day and night, Paul is praying with a group of other people. Paul and Timothy are like the persistent widow in Luke 18, who will not let God go until he blesses the Colossians with wisdom. Paul is prayerful. Paul is wise.

Paul is wise because he knows that all true wisdom comes from God, and that Jesus is the embodiment of all that is wise. He says that in Christ, "...are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). So, the wisest thing a person can do is to: "walk in him [Jesus], rooted and built up in him and established in the faith..." (Col. 2:6-7).

The wisest thing we can do is believe Jesus.

Paul commends belief in Jesus, and calls the Colossians to pray and appropriate this wisdom from God by walking the Christian life. He writes, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:16-17). We are called to sing to each other, not in frozen isolation but in a joyful, life-giving community.

The Christian life is an abundant, prayerful, wise, and seasoned life, indeed! Out of the overflow of the Christian life comes our approach to the world.

And yet, sin is crouching at the door, and its desire is to have the Colossians (and us!). Sin wants to make the Colossians like the sluggard in Proverbs 24, drowsy and dumb. They have been assaulted by spiritual seduction, nearly kidnapped by false teachers (Col. 2:8-15). They are at times distracted by regulations regarding food and the liturgical calendar (Col. 2:16-23). They are being lured by sex, idolatry, anger, lying, and all manner of worldliness as their flesh claws at their new life in Christ. They are struggling to worship as families, work as unto Christ, and live a life worthy of the Gospel (Col. 3:14-25).

Does this sound familiar? We are still struggling with sin, aren't we?

Paul concludes this letter by offering three exhortations:

Pray. Walk. Speak. Do all of this to the glory of God. Repeat.

I think the main issue that this text brings up for us is this: When we are prayerless, we stop walking with God in wisdom *toward* others. Instead, we normally begin to *walk away from God and others simultaneously* and grow in our own personal protectiveness. We put our walls up. When we grow prayerless, we go inward and insular. When we go prayerless, we isolate. We stop speaking boldly, clearly, and in a gracious way. We stop looking at God.

Prayerfulness, as we'll see, draws you into direct contact with the living God. When you come into contact with the living God, you realize that the Gospel is advancing in the whole world, and it is bearing fruit and increasing (Col. 1:6-7). The Gospel is the power of God (Romans 1:16), and wherever it goes, it bears fruit, both in our own personal lives and in the lives of those we speak to. God is not bound, and neither is the Gospel. This emboldens the Christian to live the Christian life.

So, while Sin causes us to go prayerless, to grow foolish, and to speak unseasonably.

Jesus saves us into a life of prayer, wisdom, and seasonable speech to the glory of God.

This draws us to our main points:

1. Christians are saved into prayerfulness (Col. 4:2-4).
2. Christians are saved into wisdom (Col. 4:5)
3. Christian are seasoned by grace (Col. 4:6).

First, Christians are saved into prayerfulness. We are saying that "Christians are saved into" a Christian life of prayerfulness because of everything that comes before Colossians 4:2-4. Christians are saved *from* sin and *into* a relationship with the living God. They are transferred from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Colossians 1:13). Every step of obedience is a step of deeper, joyful intimacy with God, a step of faith, belief, and trust in God's finished work. It's existence in a new domain.

So, when Paul says, "*Continue* steadfastly in prayer..." he implies that the new birth has occurred, that these Colossian believers are "saints" (Col. 1:2), and that they are like children learning to walk. They have been radically reborn by the miraculous work of God. They are spiritually alive. They have repented of sin and received the grace of God in the Gospel. They have been buried with Christ and raised from the dead to walk in open communion with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Col. 2:11-12). They know God and are known by God. As such, they have taken up their new native language: Prayer. They are calling God "Father" and their fellow Christian brothers and sisters "family."

So Paul writes,

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.

Benj Foreman helped us to see last week that preaching the Gospel is part and parcel of the Christian Life. It's a part of who we are. If we are not preaching the Gospel, we have to ask: do we know the Gospel? If we know the Gospel, what is standing in the way of our proclamation of it?

Paul's answer: Closed doors. So, he asks for prayer so that the door might open. And, that he might make the mystery clear. We need to realize that Paul's effectiveness in ministry, his razor sharp letters, his boldness in persecution came from his prayer life and the prayers of others.

Open doors and clarity of speech come from a steadfast practice of prayer.

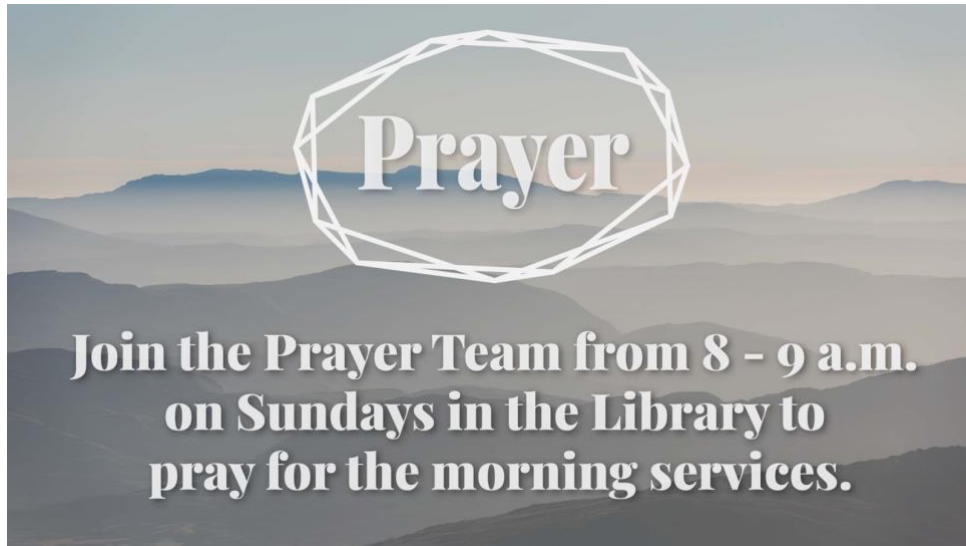
Paul says that persuasiveness, clarity, beauty, elegance are all granted to you through prayer, not a school of rhetoric.

So, if you want God to throw the door of salvation open for someone, like the someone on the list you just created, pray that he does. If you want better preaching in this pulpit or the pulpit of your heart, start praying for it!

Prayer begets Gospel preaching. Prayerlessness stifles Gospel preaching.

There are three straightforward ways of applying this;

First, Sunday Prayer Meetings. Every Sunday morning, our prayer team simply devotes itself to prayer for the preaching of God's Word and the body. If you'd like a place to put this into practice, join this group on Sunday mornings at 8am. One author provocatively states, "You can tell how popular a preacher or evangelist is by who comes on Sunday morning...but you can tell how popular Jesus is by who comes to the prayer meeting." Or, more kindly: "Our pastors are as deeply encouraged by an eager and active participation in our prayer meetings as they are by our being present on Sunday mornings." And, "If you want a better pastor, you can get one by praying for the one you already have." Ha! Take the opportunity as often as you can to learn to pray by praying every Sunday at 8am.



Second, We are offering three events focused on prayer for the Women of FCBC. On Sept. 20th (Tuesday Morning), Oct. 22nd (Saturday Morning), and Nov. 12th (Saturday Morning), we are inviting the Women of FCBC to gather together to devote themselves to prayer. We believe that there is nothing better that the women of our church could devote themselves to than prayer. God is drawing us to our knees in prayer to seek God's face.



Third, read books on prayer. If you want to grow in your personal devotion to prayer, and maybe you can't pray with others at a meeting like this during this season, reading a book on prayer is a great way to grow. Consider getting a few friends together to grow in this area. You can also read others' prayers. As much as

we should be seeking for our church to hire well, to run effective programs, to serve each other, there is a need for us to grow in prayer. We need to go to our prayer closets, shut the door, and find deeper intimacy with God in prayer both personally and collectively.

One author writes, "The true problem isn't God's absence from the world [or in the Church]. He is omnipresent. The real problem is our apathy to God's presence, which manifests itself through self-centeredness and self-concern."

Prayerlessness is a sign of self-centeredness.

This is an area that I'd like to personally grow as a pastor: I am personally convicted over how many times I check my email or texts compared to how many times we check-in with the living God. One author writes, "We check our smartphones about 81,500 times per year, or once every 4.3 minutes of our waking lives..." I am embarrassed how many times I seek to feed my soul with what's on my screen, over feeding my soul with the presence of God.

Church, this is not a new problem. And, the solution is still the same: through the Gospel, God saves us into conversation with himself. We respond in intimate obedience through prayer. God is interested in saving you, sanctifying you, and changing you to make him more like himself. We get there by making room for him and spending time with him in prayer.

Christians are saved to "...*Continue* steadfastly in prayer."

That leads us to our second point.

Second, Christians are Saved to Walk in Wisdom. Paul writes, "Now that you are all prayed up:"

5 Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.

If you walk with God, you become a walking, speaking repository of God's grace in the world. Prayer emboldens you to live transparently toward others.



My kids and I were at the park recently, and they were compelled by these windup and go cars. You have all seen them. You pull them back to send them forward. In the same way, our prayer life is the backward motion through which we are wound and pointed toward others. No matter if you are an introvert, or extrovert, this is where your energy comes from for people: you are strengthened through consistent prayer to move toward people in wise, timely ways.

So pray, and then move toward others!

Paul says, this is decidedly *missional*. I think *The Message* captures the sense well as it paraphrases this passage,

5-6 Use your heads as you live and work among outsiders. Don't miss a trick. Make the most of every opportunity. Be gracious in your speech. The goal is to bring out the best in others in a conversation, not put them down, not cut them out.

Now, this phrase "Walk in wisdom *toward* outsiders" certainly means "among outsiders." Christians are called to live and work with lives that are open, visible, and transparent. One commentator writes, "The phrase 'the ones outside' refers to those who are not members of the covenant community, who are predominantly Gentile, though a small group of unbelieving Jews would not be excluded"

But it means more than this. Christians are called to walk *toward* people who are not only unlike them, but decidedly not 'one of them,' that is: to walk toward non-Christians. In other words, get on your shoes, go outside, and interact with people who don't share your central beliefs or worldview. We are to live *among* them and *toward* them.

Now, in a place like Boise, ID, we *might* begin to grow uncomfortable with this. You might say, we just moved here to be *away from* 'outsiders.' Now, we get a Pastor who wants us to move back *toward* outsiders. That's it, we're moving to

Avamore, where at least I know I'm free! This text challenges this tendency to move away.

In April of this year, the pastors and each of their spouses were sent to a Conference called T4G. At this conference, David Platt argued that there are basically three possible stances that Christians can have toward one another within the local church, especially as we relate together toward those around us, toward 'outsiders':



- 1. Facing inward, but disconnected.** This is unwise because if you are disconnected, there is no way that you can walk wisely. No one grows in the Christian life in isolation. Maybe this is you. You are looking toward the Church, toward Christ, and toward Christian community, but you are not finding connection. You stand at an awkward distance. You are wondering if you are "in" or "out". You don't feel at home. So, you don't move toward 'outsiders.' You wonder if you are one.



- 2. Facing inward, yet connected.** Maybe this is you at FCBC or in Christian community. You are well connected. You know some people in our body well. You are finding yourself to be at home, united in Christ, and enjoying fellowship with others. The danger of this is that you may be keeping others out, rather than letting them in.



- 3. United, yet facing outward.** Platt gave us a third image: united yet facing outward. This, he said, is what it means to walk in wisdom *toward outsiders*. This is the mature, Christian posture toward the world. And, it is the posture that we are called to have toward those who are 'outsiders.'

Application:

- a. Consider your relationships.** If you are disconnected from Christian community, you are not able to obey these commands because these are not singular commands, but plural ones. Paul assumes that you are working as a member of the team in the body of Christ.
- b. Consider your habits.** Is your default to go inward, not outward with your Christian community? To clasp the hands of others, only if they are like you? Do you consistently choose a night in, over a night *toward* outsiders in your Life Group or otherwise? Do your Christian friendships or families have an outward focus?
- c. Consider the posture of your friendships.** How do you need to turn outward to face and walk toward 'outsiders?' How can we help each other to do this? What resources do we need to begin doing this well as a church?

The next phrase is also very important: "Making the best use of the time." Literally, this means 'purchasing' or 'redeeming' time. In a corollary passage, Paul writes,

15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, **16** making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. **17** Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. **18** And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, **19** addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, **20** giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **21** submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:15-21).

We are including the full context here because this is not *mainly* a call for effective time management, though that is part of the equation. We might make the mistake of thinking that "making the most of the time" is talking about productivity at work, or improving our own work-life balance.

However, what Paul is referring to is effectiveness in walking *toward* outsiders for the sake of prayerful proclamation of the Gospel. He is advocating that every human interaction become charged with prayer for the sake of the of the Gospel. He says, "Don't be dumb!" Instead, "...address one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs..." (Eph. 5:17-20). Fuel up on the Spirit, not wine. Let your life become profoundly marked by gratitude. Then, in our passage, he says: "Let that wise life spill out into your relationships with other people."

This means that in Paul's view, that gathering together as believers is one of the most *productive, wise, redemptive* things that you can be engaged with. We 'gather' together so that we can 'scatter' together for the sake of the Gospel and the nations.

Illustration: Church, you have shown me illustrations of this:

- Some of you walk toward outsiders through personal evangelism.
- Some of you are giving generously to the advance of the gospel through foreign missions.
- Some of you give your time, energy, and efforts to your neighbors.
- Some of you have adopted kids, giving us a living picture of the Gospel.
- Some of you are beautifully preaching the Gospel to your own children. (By the way! Next week, we are inviting all of our kids into service for our Family Worship Service.)
- Some of you lead, serve, and minister in countless ways that it's honestly hard to keep track.

Wise living and making the most of the time means moving toward *others*.

This is the kind life we are saved into. That leads us to our third point:

Third, Christians are saved to be seasoned by grace. Because we are in direct relationship with the living God, and we are walking wisely, making the most of every interaction, Christians become the most interesting of conversationalists.



6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

The thrust of this text is to say that every Christian conversation is distinctively flavored and preserved *by grace*. Salt was used in the ancient world both as a preservative and a flavoring agent, as it is used today. Paul argues that if you understand the Gospel, and if you begin to assimilate grace into your life, your speech starts to taste good. It flavors every interaction. And, you start to see people for who they really are: unique image bearers. Rosaria Butterfield puts it this way, "The integrity of our relationships matters more than the boldness of our words." Integrity is salty.

In January of this past year, I lost my sense of taste and smell as I had COVID. All my food had was a bland sense of texture. All I could taste was the slight bitterness of my coffee from time to time. This is *not* the way that Christians speech should taste. Rather, it should be vibrantly and graciously seasoned. This has direct application to how we approach other people's souls.

Now, I am going to say something provocative. I think that gracious speech, and knowing "*how you ought to answer each person*," necessarily means that you get to know another person as they are. You meet them where they are. You move toward them, and not away from them. For some of us this causes fear because we are nervous about cultural assimilation. One author writes, "We in the church tend to be more fearful of the (perceived) sin in the world than of the sin in our own heart. Why is that? Here is what I think. I believe there is no greater enemy to vital life-breathing faith than cultural sameness."

From this passage, if you want to really get to know another person:

1. Pray for them.
2. Walk toward them in wisdom.
3. Speak graciously with them.

This takes work. Time. Effort and emotional energy. In a world of instant gratification, it will be discouraging! It will also necessarily require personal friendships!

I want to close by offering one quotation from J.I. Packer and then an invitation to respond to our series in Colossians by sharing your testimony:

J.I. Packer writes, "...personal evangelism needs normally to be founded on friendship. You are not usually justified in choosing the subject of conversation with another till you have already begun to give yourself to him in friendship and established a relationship with him in which he feels that you respect him, and are interested in him, and are treating him as a human being, and not just as some kind of 'case'. With some people, you may establish such a relationship in five minutes,

whereas others it may take months. But the principle remains the same. The right to talk intimately with another person about the Lord Jesus has to be earned, and you earn it by convincing him that you are his friend, and that you really care about him. And therefore the indiscriminate buttonholding, the intrusive barging in to the privacy of other people's souls, the thick-skinned insistence on expounding the things of God to reluctant strangers who are longing to get away—these modes of behavior, in which strong and loquacious personalities have sometimes indulged in the name of personal evangelism, should be written off as a travesty of personal evangelism. *Impersonal evangelism* would be a better name for them!"

One great way to practice personal evangelism is by starting within the local Church. We learn to speaking the Gospel amongst our own selves. So, during 2nd & 3rd service, we are inviting you to come into my office to share a few words about how the book of Colossians has impacted you over the past 3-4 months. Our sound genius Stephen B. is over there to help you record a short clip of one way that Jesus has been enough for you as we have studied the book of Colossians. God Saves Christians into Prayerful, Wise, and Seasoned Lives to the glory of God. Let's pray.