

Good morning y'all! I'm excited to be up there this morning. We are continuing in our series Jesus is Enough and we are almost finished. Up to this point Paul has been talking about the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ. He's made it very clear that Jesus is enough in every area of our lives. He's enough because he is the firstborn of all creation, he is enough to live the life that we could never live, and he is enough to raise us from death to life. Paul then applies Jesus to our relationships. He says "If this is Jesus, and this is who you are to him and how he has made it possible to have a relationship with him, here's how you are to live with one another in light of that."

Last week we talked about a few different types of relationships (wives, husbands, children, parents, workers, and bosses) and today Paul is going to continue and talk about another type of relationship. So let's dive in.

Colossians 4:2-6, "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."

So right after Paul talks about familial and working relationships and right before He describes how we are to live among people who do not follow Jesus, he inserts this line about prayer. Now at first glance we may be tempted to read this as Paul is having an ADHD moment where he's jumping back and forth between these different ideas. I feel that, it happens to me all the time. But this is actually one complete thought. It's important to remember that Paul didn't add the chapter and verse numbers or the bold titles that are in our Bibles, those were added later. Paul wrote one complete letter, and it has a flow of thought.

The reason prayer is placed here is because prayer is the center of the Christian life, and because of that, prayer is the center of how we engage in these relationships as believers.

Paul encourages the Colossians and by extension us, to "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving." Prayer is something that we are very accustomed to as believers. We pray in here a few times every Sunday, some of you may pray with your kids before bed or at the dinner table before you eat your food. As Christians we know that we're supposed to pray. That's not news. It probably wasn't news to the Colossians either. When Epaphras started the church in Colossae I'm sure it was one of the first lessons that got taught.

As Christians, prayer is one of the main ways that we connect to God. It is simply talking to God, and we can go to Him with anything. We can ask him for wisdom, we can ask for help in specific situations, we can thank Him for who He is and what He's done, we even have the freedom to cry out to Him in anger, sadness, and pain. God allows us to do that because Jesus has made it possible for us. Jesus tore the veil that once separated us from God and now we get the privilege of having an intimate relationship with God through prayer. It's such a gift to be

able to speak to the God of the universe, and I wish that it always felt like a gift. I wish prayer always brought joy and security, but that's not always our experience.

Sometimes prayer can feel like a burden, like something that we have to do not something that we get to do. Or worse, it can feel like a one way conversation where you don't feel like anyone is on the other end. I've felt that way. I know some of you have felt that way. I don't know this for sure but it wouldn't surprise me if Paul even felt this way at times. Yet, Paul reminds us that prayer is extremely beneficial to us as believers. So much so, that he tells us to devote our lives to it. To continue steadfastly in prayer means to do it habitually and with perseverance, even in the moments where we might not feel like it.

Humbling ourselves in prayer reminds us that God is God and we are not. If we could handle this life on our own, we wouldn't need to pray. But if you've been alive for any amount of time you know that it's impossible to walk through this life on your own. We need him in all areas, and especially in our relationships.

We are called to be devoted to prayer and then describes how to pray as being watchful and thankful. The Greek word that gets translated *being watchful* has basic sense of being awake and alert. How often do we pray distracted prayers or throwaway prayers? "God thanks for the food. We love you. Amen." In that moment are we really dwelling on how the creator of the world has provided for us by giving us the essentials we need? Or are we just doing it out of routine and because we are ready to eat.

You might pray like that every now and again. Or sometimes we forget to pray at all or feel like we don't need to pray? I know I can be guilty of these things, but Paul encourages us to pray passionately and to pray with intentionality. It's not an afterthought or a throwaway prayer because we have to, it's spending time communicating in the most intimate and most important relationship we will ever have. It's choosing to go to him even with the smallest of details, because we are depending on him and showing our gratitude for the things he has given to us. When we pray in this way God is glorified because we're actively communing with Him.

When we truly come to understand all that God has done for us, thankfulness is inevitable. God humbled Himself and came to this earth because He did not want to leave us in the dire situation that we were in. We were as undeserving as we could have possibly been, and in that state, Jesus died for us. That's amazing. If that were all that God had done for us that would be enough for us to sing praises to Him for eternity. But He continues to give us good gifts. He continues to grow us and change us and make us more like Jesus. He's given us families and friends and a planet to call home and a church family to live into. I could go on and on and on, but the Gospel produces a thankful heart. It's our natural response to God because of who He is and what He's done.

I shared my testimony last weekend at our men's event, and I hope that it was helpful and encouraging to the men that were there, but I'll be honest, it was really helpful to me

personally. I haven't shared my story in that manner in a few years and a lot has happened in that time, so I had to think beforehand about how I was going to share those new pieces in a way that made sense. As I was processing through it, I was reminded of the things that God has done for me, the things He has brought me out of, and the ways that He has grown me through grace. It reminded me that I have so much to be thankful for. God gives us such good gifts.

I'd encourage y'all to do the same. If you're struggling to feel thankfulness towards God, think through your life; the good, the bad, and the ugly. Think through it all and see where God has been and how's He's met you in those places, and believe He is still working. Thinking on what God has done, is doing, and will do, even in the smallest of details, leads us to place where praying continually being watchful with thanksgiving.

God has gifted us with prayer. It is the way that we can most intimately connect with Him, and the closer that we are to Him, the more effective we'll be in all our relationships, including our relationship with "outsiders" or "non-believers."

In verse 3, He says, "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— <sup>4</sup> that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak."

Prayer is not only a means of relationship with God, but it's also a catalyst for gospel opportunities and the grace and wisdom to handle them well. Prayer is essential in sharing the Gospel with others. Paul is actively looking for ways to tell others about the life-changing power of Jesus, and he knows that the best way to go about this is by asking God to open doors to the gospel.

Let's remember that Paul is writing this letter from prison and still asking "Pray that God would open a door for us to share the Gospel and that I would do it well." I think if I was in Paul's shoes, I'd be praying that God would open a door, specifically the one to my cell, so that I could get out of there. But he doesn't ask for that. No, he realized that there could be just as many opportunities for the advance of the gospel even though he is in chains. He prays that the gospel — the mystery of Christ — would travel freely, not that he would. He's not exactly going anywhere, so he knows that God has to be the one to open the doors for those opportunities.

But even more than that, Paul knows that the only way people are going to hear and believe the message of the gospel is if God reveals it to them. Paul requests this because he knows it is not in his hands to save sinners. That's God's job. Jesus says in John 6:44 that, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them." God is sovereign over salvation. It's his job to open people's hearts and to reveal Himself to them.

Paul saw this from his own story. He was a Jewish man who heard the Gospel message that Christians were preaching, and he killed them for it. Any number of people could have

evangelized to Paul and he wouldn't have listened. It took Jesus breaking into Paul's reality on the road to Damascus and changing his heart for Paul to believe.

Paul knew from experience it was not in man's power to save sinners. It wasn't in his and it's not within ours either. That's God's job, which is why we have to rely on prayer when it comes to sharing the Gospel with people.

This should be a great comfort for us, but usually when we talk about sharing the gospel there's usually this tension that falls over the room. It doesn't matter what age you are, I see it with students and I see it with adults, and it happens in my heart too. We know that as Christians we are called to share the gospel with outsiders, to share why we put our hope and our trust in Jesus. We know that, but at the same time we can also feel massive resistance in our hearts towards sharing our faith. There are tons of reasons that happens. It could be because you have no idea how to even begin having that conversation. It could be because in our current cultural climate you're afraid of how you'll be seen or how people will respond. It could be because you are afraid you won't have the answers to questions they may ask. I don't know what it is for you. I do know that I've felt all those things and many more when I've thought about sharing the gospel with someone.

But Paul says something in this section that I love, because it's so relatable to that feeling. It's in verse 4, he says, I pray that God would open a door for us to declare the mystery of Christ, "that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak." It's amazing because we know that this was not Paul's first rodeo. He'd been on three missionary journeys by this point. He has shared the Gospel with outsiders many times, and he's going to go on to share it many more times. You'd think if there was anybody who would be confident in their ability to share the Gospel, it'd be Paul. But he still asks for prayer that he would clearly communicate the gospel. The man who quite literally wrote the book (through the Holy Spirit of course) still relied completely on God when he shared the gospel with people.

When we share the Gospel with people, prayer should always be the first, middle, and last step. God goes before us here, so we can trust Him in those spaces. I hope that's encouraging to you. It is to me! He creates the opportunities, He helps us speak, and He changes people's hearts to accept Him. That's incredible! It's all God!

Ok, so we pray for opportunities then what? We step into them. Paul does not stop at praying for opportunities, he prays for them expectantly, and then he seeks those opportunities out and steps into them when they appear. He knows the Colossians would have opportunities to share their faith as well, and so in these last two verses of this section, Paul gets super practical with them.

He encourages them to <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." Paul assumes here that the Colossian Christians are living their

lives among the outsiders to their faith. They haven't shut themselves off from the rest of the world and decided to live in some kind of holy huddle. They actively living alongside them, and Paul encourages them to walk in wisdom in their relationships with them.

That first phrase "to walk in wisdom" is an "as you are walking" kind of statement. As we go through life, as we encounter "outsiders" or those who are not believers, move toward them. Invite them into your home. Get to know them. Spend time with them. We shouldn't separate ourselves from those who don't know Jesus. We should be first at inviting them into relationships with us.

The verse continues "making the best use of the time." I love this phrase. Another translation says "making the most of every opportunity." Our time on this planet is so short and part of walking in wisdom is understanding how valuable your time is.

It's really easy for all of us to understand how valuable money is. We work for it, we know how much we get paid per hour or per year, we know how much things cost. We know that money has a tangible value to it. But how much more valuable is our time. We can always make more money, but we can't make more time. It's the one thing that we can't get more of no matter how much we try. God has allotted all of us a set amount of time on this planet. How are you spending your time? Do we want to spend it with our eyes down just pushing forward with our own to-do list? Or do we want to spend it seeking out ways to invite people into the love of Christ?

There are outsiders to the faith all around us, and we only have so much time left with them. A certain number of conversations, a certain number of meals. Wisdom is knowing that your time is precious; the question is, how are you going to use that time you have with non-believers? How are you going to speak to them? How are you going to engage them?

Well, Paul has a suggestion. He says that we are to engage them wisely with the content of our conversations and the tone of our interactions. The Greek words that are behind "speech," "gracious," and "salt" are used together in first-century literature to refer to speech that is gracious and attractive — speech that is humble, but also winsome. It's the type of conversation that you have with someone where you just don't want it to stop because you're both in the groove and it's just fun. In other words, Paul wants the presentation of the gospel to the outside world done in a manner that captures the gospel's excitement and that is able to answer the unbeliever's legitimate questions. As we read this passage, it becomes clear that the freedom the gospel brings should make Christians the most engaging people on the planet.

The goal is not to try too hard to be funny or to speak and act in a manner that is not true to one's personality. Instead, our goal should be that we understand the gospel and its implications so well that the joy it brings flows out of us as we talk about it. Our life and speech

should be such that people can see the freedom that Jesus brings and get a glimpse of what it really means to have new life in Christ.

Sometimes I think we can get so turned around in our conversations with those outside our faith because we aren't sure about how to interact with them. We can feel a tension between wanting to be close to them, but not wanting to support their behavior, but wanting them to know that God loves them. We can get so in our heads about it. You know how Paul navigated that tension? He shared the gospel with them. He engaged them not as enemies, but as people who were lost. They're lost. They're wandering around the world looking for things to fulfill them and satisfy them, but nothing ever does. It's exactly where we all were before Jesus saved us. So Paul meets them in that space and tells them where he found freedom. And Paul did it in a way that was winsome.

Romans 2:4, says that it's God's kindness that is meant to lead us to repentance. It's not the shame of God or the name-calling of God that leads people to repentance. It's His kindness. And in our conversations with non-believers we should always seek to emulate that kindness and tell people about how kind our God is. If our speech is gracious and winsome, then we're stepping through that door that God opens exactly as he'd want us to.

And because God is sovereign over their souls, our success doesn't come in making converts, or in getting someone to say yes to Jesus. Our success comes in sharing the gospel. God handles the rest. When we are faithful to step through the doors God opens for us, that's where we glorify Him. Jesus is enough to save sinners, just like he did you and me. When we are faithful to share, he is faithful to save.

(Application: 1) We pray intentionally for all things

Our application for today is simple. First we intentionally pray for all things. Don't miss the amazing opportunity you have to commune with the God of the universe. Pray that God would grow that desire in your heart. Pray that God would open a door for us to share the gospel, we pray that we would communicate the gospel clearly, and that He would open their hearts to trust in Jesus.

Application 2) We live life with outsiders purposefully

Second, we live life with outsiders to our faith purposefully. We live life among them. Don't section yourself off from relationships with outsiders. Invite them over. Get to know them and their families. They may live life vastly different from you, and that's ok. Just be you, God doesn't need you to be anything other than that. Use who He's made you to be to love outsiders well. To use the time wisely.

Application 3) Always be prepared to share what God has done for you.

And last, always be prepared to share what God has done for you. God has given you a story, and He has rescued you from death to life. That's not a boring story. It's a miracle that God has done in you. Tell that story. Don't be afraid to tell people what God has done in you and through you. Those stories are what cause people to ask questions about our faith. And then we leave the rest up to Him. He is faithful to save others, just like He did us. We can rest in that, and we can step into it.

And to remind us of what God has done for us, we're going to end our service by taking communion. If you've trusted in Jesus, God has opened your heart. By taking communion we get to acknowledge how great, how loving, and how endlessly wonderful He is towards us. Let's take some time and worship Him in prayer. As you're praying, thank Him for who He is and what He has done for you. Remember who your God is, and I'll be back in a bit to lead us.

Communion is not a time for us to double down on our commitment to God, but it is a time to rest in what He has done for us. It's the reason we pray with thanksgiving. It's the reason why we tell our stories to outsiders, because Jesus carried us to the table of God, sat us in a seat we didn't deserve, and told us that it was finished.

"The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

Pray to close.