

# COLOSSIANS

A B O V E A L L



## COLOSSIANS: WATCHFUL WITNESS

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Scripture Reference: Colossians 4:2-6

Please stand for the reading of God's Word. We're going to be reading Colossians 4:2-6.

"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.

Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." This is God's Word. You may be seated.

So if you guys have heard the old adage about the fact that Mother's Day is one of the most attended Sundays of the church calendar year and Father's Day is the lowest, right? I'll let you draw your own conclusions, but if you're a father in this room right now, I don't know if your family drug you here, or if you drug them here or you just are here because you're always here, but just very thankful for you. All right, let's talk about this last passage. When you became a Christian, you probably learned pretty quickly and started to pick up on a few things that were supposed to be normative for all believers, right? Some practices that we are all called to. Christians read their Bibles. Christians sing when they gather. Christians pray. Christians give. Christians share their faith with others, right? You weren't a Christian very long before you figured out these things were supposed to be happening.

And many of us have struggled deeply in significant ways over the years, as time has gone on, that we have lacked a little bit of passion or energy for those activities as our spiritual lives have carried on. And for Doxa, having been a part of this church really from the beginning, I can say that I think on the whole, we have many strengths and gifts, and I'm thankful for that. We are a very generous church. We love God's word around here. But I think on the whole, we have

plenty of room to grow in the areas of prayer and evangelism, and both of those are touched on in this closing passage. So let's be honest with each other for a moment. We are probably not super great at this. You might be more like hobby and that's great. We all know that prayer and evangelism are kind of a big deal for Christians and we just aren't necessarily great at it. Most of us know that some folks have those gifts, right? That God has given them an extra portion, if you will, of a passion for prayer or they're just naturally evangelistic and can bring up Jesus in almost any conversation on the street, any restaurant, any interaction with others that don't know Christ. But for most of us, that's not us. And we also know that these aspects of our Christian lives are not reserved for that varsity team, those super Christians as we think of them in our minds, right, who are always just enjoying the presence of God, that wake up each morning with a perfect cup of coffee, in a perfectly quiet house, just looking at Jesus, smiling, receiving his love. Right? Now, we can read our Bibles and see the truth that all of us are called to a certain measure of this. But here's the thing, the Bible never talks about prayer or evangelism as obligations.

It never talks about those things as something that we need to prove. And certainly never is something that we need to feel guilt or shame about. In fact, the last thing I want to do is present a sermon on the importance of prayer and the meaning of it, and to fill your tank with a little bit of guilt or shame about your prayerlessness or lack of desire to talk to others about Jesus, and then have you 180 for the next 48 hours, but then settle back into the same valley you found yourselves yesterday. That's not a win for us. Guilt and shame are fast fuels. Let me explain what I mean by that. We got to hang out with some friends that we haven't seen since before COVID last night. And I looked over and my son and daughter had discovered, we'll just say they found the dessert table before they found the dinner table.

Somebody had left out some very beautifully decorated cookies. There were popsicles in the freezer. There was a lot of things going around. And if you ever had that moment as a parent, where you realize that all your child has consumed for the last two hours is 12 pounds of sugar, you feel that ominous, daunting feeling, just knowing that the meltdown timer has officially started. Any of you parents say, amen? Yeah, that kind of fuel doesn't work. That burns off real quickly. And usually not in a pretty fashion. And in many ways for us, guilt and shame are the same thing. They're not going to work for you. Guilt and shame are not going to accomplish the transforming work of Christ in your life. And you may make small, temporary changes for a moment to get around the feeling, but the problem is, is that you're not actually moving closer to Christ.

So this week, very briefly, I want to say a few things about this passage as he closes this letter. And I think it's interesting that even in II Corinthians, Paul says that he wants these fellow Christians to join him in the labor of prayer. Isn't that an interesting word choice? So if you feel like your prayer life is not stellar, I want you to just to receive grace this morning, to not feel guilt or shame and just know that yes, it can be hard and take hard work and that's okay. I think God's going to work in us and through us today. The majority of what the apostle Paul has told Doxa so far in the book of Colossians really has been about our inward lives. The ways that we think of ourselves, the ways we relate to Jesus, and how we relate to those inside the church, both the other believers in the room, as well as those who share the responsibility of teaching the flock.

But here at the end, he's going to finally pivot and turn the discussion outward with Jesus's Lordship in mind, he looks at evangelism and how we interact with non-Christians. And I just want to say right now, if you are someone that would not describe yourself as a believer or a follower of Jesus Christ and you're with us today, super thankful that you're here. A lot of ways you could spend your Sunday morning, and I'm just, I'm thankful that you're here listening in. If you have questions or comments or anything that you want to talk about afterwards, I'll be available, would love to chat with you. And so, as Paul is talking about evangelism, it seems that he doesn't want his previous teaching earlier in the book about Christians distancing themselves from false teachers to be wrongly applied to non-Christians. Think about that for a second. He does not want his instructions to distance ourselves from false teachers to be wrongly applied to non-Christians. In fact, Paul wants us to run as fast as we can from false teachers, but also to move toward non-believers with wisdom. That's a very interesting concept and something that I want us to think about this morning. Let me pray for us as we dive into his word.

Jesus, be with us this morning. Thank you for the great fathers in this church, that though they are imperfect, they chase after you. They understand how important it is for you to be the very center of their families. I pray as we close this book, that we would be mindful of the ways you have spoken to us over these last few months, and that you would help us hear from you. That we would be quick to recognize the difference between conviction, which comes from your Holy Spirit and is for our good, and guilt, which comes from the enemy and is designed to tear us down. Let us recognize your voice. We pray these things for your glory. Amen.

All right. Chapter four Colossians, starting in verse two. It says, "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving." So Paul begins this section with a call to be alert and thankful in prayer in light of Christ's authority and preeminence. This idea of watchfulness is a drum that is beat over and over and over again throughout the New Testament. And so what does he want us to watch for? Well according to the context of this letter, cause we're always paying attention to context, he wants us watching out for false teachers, those that are preaching something other than Christ crucified. He wants us watching out for spiritual attack, right? We heard that from pastor Paul Dean a few weeks ago. We watch for voices inside of us that sound accusatory and condemning because that's not the voice of the father. He wants us praying for or watching for opportunities to be a witness and things that keep us from prayer. Now here's, here's what I suspect to be true of many of us, those of us who really struggle with prayer. I think that we have really struggled with prayer historically because perhaps we're bored and because we have control or at least we think we have control. Let me talk about those two things briefly. Number one, I think we get bored in prayer easily. I think we've prayed really big prayers in the past, and we didn't feel like Jesus answered those things immediately, or at least in the way that we expected, and the whole thing felt effective to us, and so we pushed away from the table a bit. And the fact is is that our prayer lives are not usually fireworks. We don't understand why. And I, it sounds like a joke, but it's not, like I want you to really think about what this means. We can't understand why if Bezos can figure out how to get anything to our house in 48 hours after clicking our phone four or five times, why can't God do the same thing? Why can't God do the same thing?

Number two, we don't pray because we think we have control. I don't have time to unpack this today in the way that I would want to, but I will say none of you will ever convince me that this

isn't true. There is no one more prayerful than the mother of a really, really sick child. I don't mean has a cold, I mean like a really sick child. There's no one that goes to their knees faster than a dad who was recently laid off and doesn't know how he's going to provide for his family. The very moment we get punched in the face with the reality that we control so very little in this life, that's usually when we go to God and ask him to show up. Why is that?

I'm not saying I want this for us, but it does say a lot about the human heart that it takes cancer or a car accident or something so extreme to snap us out of this sense of self-reliance and make us realize that we don't sit on the throne. I want to say again, not that I wish this on anybody, but that it's a good thing to know that truth. It is a good thing to know that we don't sit on the throne. It is a good thing to know that the father is the one who is in control and he does a far better job running the universe than you or I would do. The more we can embrace that and be at peace with that, I think the more we will recognize the fruit of that in our prayer life. It's also why for many of us, our prayers sound more like a shopping spree than a relationship. We start our prayer and immediately start listing off all the things that we need. That's not a bad thing at all. I would contend that's one aspect of our prayer lives. And honestly, this one for me personally is tough. It's very easy for me to talk to God throughout the day. But if I zoom out and look at the content of those conversations, I think that sometimes it looks more like a shopping list and less like relationship.

Verse three. "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." So we know from Paul here, that God is the one who opens opportunities to hearts and the message of the gospel, not us. Our job is to be ready when the door swings open and God is the one who enables Paul and all of us to speak it effectively. Notice that Paul says that it was in the sharing of his faith that he ended up in jail, right? It wasn't for having private Bible studies or listening to podcasts at the gym or decorating his house with Bible verses. It was his effort to talk with those outside of the faith about his life inside the faith that got him noticed and ultimately in trouble.

And Paul here isn't like most of us in that he's not praying just to get out of jail or for a more comfortable cell to stay in or questioning God's love for him because surely God would never send one of his beloved into a jail cell. No, he instead asked that his effective work in prison, that his voice and his words in his cell, would be useful for God's purposes. That his words about the person and work of Jesus Christ will be clear. And so here's the good news for you today, and I want you to hear this. If Paul believes that prison is a good place for witness, then wherever you spend your time in the week is a good place for witness. That's good news. None of us in this church are on the sidelines when it comes to God's mission. Your neighborhood park is a place of witness. Your cubicle at work? Place of witness. Conference call, Zoom call, call number 567, is a place of witness.

Your time on the playground or the sidelines at your kids' sports is a place of witness. You are a student, junior high, high school, college, your classroom is a place of witness. And I love Paul's play on words in II Timothy two on this, when he says, "I may be in chains, but God's word is not able to be chained." I was speaking with a friend this week and he's someone who historically would say he has a version of the gift of prophecy in the scriptures. He has repeatedly in his life experienced moments where when walking around strangers, that he feels like God has given him a word or maybe a topic to bring up. And that, that has turned into very

fruitful conversation with those people. And again, these are complete strangers, right? And he had noticed that over the course of COVID in this last year, that he felt like the way he described it was the volume on that gift has turned down, that he has experienced less of that. And he's pressing in right now in this season, there's no quote, unquote, happy ending to this story. It's not solved yet. He's still intent on carrying this out, and I love that. I love that even as he was processing and asking questions about this, he was thinking through like, maybe God gave this gift for a season for a particular reason, right? Or maybe there's something standing in the way between myself and God that he's trying to show me so that I continue to love the giver more than the gift, but he was asking those questions. And I love that that was part of his process.

Verse five. It says, "Walk in wisdom towards outsiders making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person."

So Paul calls the church to walk wisely toward not away from non-Christians stewarding our time on mission effectively. And not only are we called to give our time well, but our words also being gracious and life-giving in how we speak. And just like I Peter 3:15, Paul actually expects that the world is going to have questions for us when they see the way that we live. And I think that that's true today, but perhaps for the wrong reasons. Paul expects us to live in such a way that is so counter-cultural that the world wants to know what the, what the heck is going on in us. Why would you do it? Why would you live that kind of sacrificial life? Why would you love that way? Why would you give that way? And that Paul's instruction here is that we would have the answers for who Christ is and who he has been to our lives. I want to say this to every person who feels like they are not an evangelist. Your most powerful witness in this life is simply telling other people what Christ has done for you. You do not have to have a PhD in theology to be a witness of Jesus Christ. You don't have to graduate from seminary. You don't have to even be able to name all the books of the Bible.

But you are able to share with others what Christ has done in your life. And in my life, I have seen many, many times that the conversation, it was so much more important. Maybe I had thoughts or, you know, they had a question about a passage, or why do Christians do this? I love those conversations and those are fun for me. But the real work that I've seen happen in witness has been way more about who Jesus is to me personally, not being some kind of answer guy or answer gal so I hope that helps alleviate some of the pressure that you may put on yourself. And I'll add this, too. It's important when we share our story of who Jesus is to us, that Jesus is the hero of our story, and not us. Have you ever heard somebody share their testimony? And honestly, they were a lot more impressive in this story than Jesus was. I think sometimes we do this unknowingly.

You are not the hero in your testimony. The craziness of your story, the intensity of your sin, these things are not the hero of your story. Jesus Christ is the hero of your story. He is the one who chased after you. He is the one who chased you down. He's the one that came to you in your moment of need. This is part of the picture of what it means to be dead in our sins. Dead people don't save themselves. You and I were dead when Christ came to us, he's the one that looked at the messiness of your life and said, "Yes! I want all of that. You are mine." He is the one who left heaven and the comforts of that place. He's been so good to us. He is the hero. Now, when these verses in Colossians were written, Christians were a minority in a hostile

environment. There was a lot of angst believers. I love what commentator David Garland says about this passage. He says, "They must blend wisdom with a sense of reckless urgency that exhausts every opportunity to reach unbelievers. Gracious speech forms a stark contrast with the sins of speech listed in chapter three and the cocky arrogance of the opponents who belittle the Christian faith." If you have been awake the last year, you've probably heard some of the cocky arrogance of the opponents who belittle the Christian faith. It's interesting, this passage says we are to be seasoned with salt. And this was an expression used in the ancient near east, not to mean obviously full of cuss words and profanity, which is what we think of when we think of somebody with salty language, right, but actually meant to be using witty, amusing, clever and humorous speech. Isn't that interesting that God would command us and call us to engage with non-Christians with witty, amusing, clever and humorous speech? To be gracious, not condemning or judging. I love that. Paul is saying that their saltiness will prevent them from being ignored in their culture as irrelevant bores. And I know for a fact, some of you have been hesitant to talk about your faith because you're concerned that you won't have all of the brilliant answers for those hard-hitting questions.

And non-believers can sometimes speak in a way that is off-putting or harsh or intimidating. But again, your greatest weapon is not a graduate degree. It is you knowing your own story and you have that, you know your story. It may take a bit of practice to share that story in a way that makes it clear that Jesus is the hero. But honestly, it's super easy to practice with others in the faith. If you're in a DNA or an MC, here at Doxa that is a great space for you to practice telling your story in a way, and then they can give you feedback and let you know what they heard in that story. If it sounds like you are the one that is impressive, or if it really is Jesus. When we jump into these conversations with others, we do so graciously, never expecting them to see what we couldn't see before Christ opened our eyes. I think for Doxa, this is an important one. So I'm going to say it again. We do not expect for non-Christians to see or believe the things that we could not see and believe before God opened our eyes.

We're never defensive about our faith. We don't join the chorus of outrage and judgment and canceling others. My last thing I'll say here, that I know for evangelism, particularly on the east side, we have a high percentage of introverts on the east side and a high percentage of introverts in this church. You've heard me talk about evangelism and introverts before. If you weren't around or don't remember, because that was a really long time ago, and that feels like a fairly unrealistic expectation for you to remember those things, I told you that introverts are really good at reaching other introverts. In fact, extroverts are just kind of a pain to most introverts.

See, now that joke doesn't work in another church because yeah, you get it. But it's true though. Extroverts can just feel like a lot. And that's coming from somebody who rides the fence, depending on what day it is. I feel like a lot, but somebody who doesn't constantly talk about themselves, isn't filling every gap in every conversation with more words in the break room at work can be a wonderful place to ask questions about somebody's story, to find out about their lives, to find out about their religious upbringing. If they have any church background or experience. What they think of when they think of Christians. The good spaces for that. God loves showing up in those moments with power and passion. And frankly, if you've ever done this, then you already know this to be true., God often will give you the words that you need in that situation.

I love that he loves us and the loss enough to do that in those moments. So in closing, I just want to share something I heard recently from one of my favorite teaching pastors. He said that prayer is hard for many of us because we grew up in homes where our relationship with our parents was fine as long as we behaved ourselves and left mom or dad alone. Don't make a fuss, play by the rules, and it'll go well for you. If we bother them, pester them, then there's disappointment. Then there's discipline. Then there's all these hard things. And so we've applied the same learned patterns to our relationship with God. And prayer is just as much about our own boredom as it is us feeling bothersome to God. Maybe you can relate to that. Isaiah 62 says that God has appointed watchmen who would continually bother him about the future of God's people. That he actually created a role in his people of people who would do nothing, but talk to him, petition, and pray. This is not something that is offensive to him. This is something that God enjoys. The father enjoys when his kids go to him in prayer. And let me be more specific. You are not a pest to the father. You are his kids.

And I pray that that feels real to you. It is real, but I pray that it feels real to you this morning. He's not too busy solving bigger problems. He cares about you. And he knows exactly what you're up against right now. He knows exactly what you're celebrating. He knows exactly what you're struggling with, and he cares about you. He wants to minister to you in the midst of that. Let me pray for us.

Jesus. Your desire is to be known, for your name to be known, your character and work to be known. And I think what I would want for our church more than anything else is for us to simply remember our lives before you. To recognize the gifts we have received, the ways you have worked in us, and just simply to believe that you can do that for anyone. That you actually love working in difficult, far from God type lives. That's kind of your specialty. And that you desire to use us. And so my prayer is that a year from now that there are some in this room who today don't know you because you spoke through people in this room this morning. My prayer is that we would grow in our comfort and desire to be with you in conversation. That honestly we would grow more and more tired of the noise and the chaos, and instead recognize that our souls desperately need some quiet. That we need to, yes, tell you about our needs, but also to hear from you. And I pray that for those who have strengths in these areas, those that, are particularly strong in areas of prayer and in sharing their faith, that we would not step out or sideline ourselves, but instead watch and learn and model our own lives after them, as we see them enjoy these things. So work in us and through us, we pray these things for your glory. Amen.

