



## ROOTED

"as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,  
firmly rooted and built up in Him"

## Open Doors

### Colossians 4:2-6

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## OPEN DOORS

### Colossians 4:2-6

Thirty years after the resurrection, Paul wrote a letter to the believers in Colossae urging them to keep their eyes on Jesus. Paul mentioned Jesus in 53 of the 95 verses in this letter. He lifted Jesus as the one and only Savior and Lord, and said, “*As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, firmly rooted and being built up in Him*” (Colossians 2:6-7, NAS).

We believe what was written to the Colossians is written for us as well. Paul urges us to “walk in manner worthy of the Lord” and to give Jesus “first place in everything.” He warns us, “Do not let anyone deceive you,” or distract you from believing, trusting, and following Jesus. Paul encourages us to “set our minds on things above, where Christ is seated.” He urges us to “put off the old self” and “put on the new self,” so our lives will reflect the character of Christ. He said, “Put on a heart of compassion,” to put on the heart of Jesus. And with one summarizing statement, Paul said, “Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

After lifting Jesus and describing the privilege and joy of our salvation, Paul’s final appeal is about sharing the Gospel. “Devote yourselves to prayer ... that God may open a door for the message” (Colossians 4:2-3, NIV).<sup>1</sup>

In his research on the early church, historian Michael Green describes the passion of the early Christians. “They were passionately convinced of the truth of the Gospel. They were persuaded that men and women were lost without it. (The Gospel was) the key to eternal life, without which they would perish. They shared in God’s love (and wanted) to pour it out on a needy world. They (embraced) the Great Commission. They sought to penetrate society with the Gospel which had such a profound effect upon them ... It affected everything they did and everyone they met ... In the early days, the quality of their lives was blazingly distinct.”<sup>2</sup>

And what motivated them? One, their sense of gratitude. Michael Green writes, “They did it because of the overwhelming experience of the love of God which they had received through Jesus Christ.”<sup>3</sup> What motivated them? Their sense of responsibility. Green writes, “They lived their lives under the eye of God, and they were determined to please him in all they did.”<sup>4</sup> They were also motivated by their sense of concern. They lived with an “awareness of the peril of those without Christ ... They really believed that those without Christ would suffer eternal loss, and this thought drove them to reach others with the Gospel.”<sup>5</sup> Michael Green ends his research declaring evangelism as “the Church’s first priority. Evangelism was the very lifeblood of the early Christians, and so we find (in Acts 2:47), that ‘day by day the Lord was adding to their number those who were being saved.’”<sup>6</sup>

Today, we end our study in Colossians. How sad if this was just another Bible study. How sad if it does not stir our hearts to tell people what Jesus has done for us and why we love Him so much. Our lives are to be about the Gospel. That’s why Paul ended his letter saying, “Devote yourselves to prayer ... that God may open a door for the message” (Colossians 4:2-3, NIV). ***Our simple prayer, and passionate prayer, should be, “Lord, give me an opportunity and give me the words to say.”***

## PRAY FOR OPEN DOORS

The last thing Paul wrote to the Colossians was, “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful” (Colossians 4:2, NIV).<sup>7</sup>

Prayer is the heartbeat of the church.<sup>8</sup> Prayer is the heartbeat of every Christian. We are totally dependent on God, and that’s why we pray. This is certainly true when it comes to living on mission. “Devote yourselves to prayer.” Persevere in prayer, Paul said elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> Never stop praying for those you know and love to come to Jesus Christ.

“Pray for us,” Paul said, “that God may open a door for our message” (Colossians 4:3, NIV). Pray for open doors.<sup>10</sup> Pray for opportunities. To tell people what Jesus has done for you, and to tell them why you love Him so much. Pray for open doors.

“Pray for us,” Paul said, “so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should” (Colossians 4:3-4, NIV). Paul was in prison for preaching the Gospel, and he did not want fear to get the best of him. So he asked the Colossians, “Pray that I may proclaim it clearly.” “Proclaim.” He prayed for boldness. May we share our faith with boldness and confidence and courage. “Pray that I may proclaim it clearly,” he said. May we share it “clearly.” May we make the Gospel simple and understandable.

Then Paul said, “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders, make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone” (Colossians 4:5-6, NIV).

A person can know the Gospel and have terrible people skills. Paul used three words to describe how we are to talk to non-believers. Be wise, be gracious, and let your words be seasoned with salt. Wise, knowing what to say. Peter said, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15, NIV). Be gracious, knowing how to say it. Be gracious and loving. Never intimidate or bully a person. And let your words be “seasoned with salt.” Let your words have flavor. Like describing the flavor of a great meal, so describe the flavor of Jesus’ love. Let a person taste God’s amazing grace.

***Our simple prayer, and passionate prayer, should be, “Lord, give me an opportunity and give me the words to say.”*** When God opens a door, our job is to open our mouths.

## LESSONS FROM PHILIP

A young guy in his late twenties came to our church in Austin. His name was Chris. He was confused about his direction in life and confused about problems in his new marriage and needed someone to talk to. So I offered to meet with him. One meeting turned into a dozen meetings. When we talked about his marital problems, I had to be a counselor. When he asked for career advice, I had to be like a father. When he asked me spiritual questions, I had to be a pastor. But mostly, I was just a friend. After a lot of time, a lot of talking, and a lot of chicken wings,

Chris accepted Christ. Jesus was the answer to all the issues he had, and all it took was me being a friend.

Friendship is the key that so often unlocks a person's heart and opens their heart to hear the Gospel. When historian Michael Green writes about the spread of the Gospel in the 1st and 2nd centuries, he writes a lot about friendship. Jesus befriended Andrew. And Andrew told Peter about Jesus. Peter told Cornelius. Ananias told Saul. Pantaenus told Clement. Justin told Tatian. Felix told Octavius. Origen told Gregory. Philip told an Ethiopian, and the Ethiopian told his queen and his country about Jesus.

The story of Philip and the Ethiopian is recorded in Acts 8. There are several lessons we can learn from their conversation about sharing our faith.<sup>11</sup> Most important is *letting the Spirit lead us and give us the words to say*.

***Lesson #1 – Make up your mind to live your life on mission.*** Threatened by persecution, Philip fled to Samaria and “began proclaiming Christ” (Acts 8:5, NIV). Acts 8 says he traveled about “preaching the Gospel to many villages” and “he preached Jesus” (Acts 8:25, 35, NIV).

Philip made up his mind. He knew what he believed, he knew what he would die for, and he decided what he was going to live for. He made up his mind to live his life on mission. And that's a decision each of us must make.

Jesus calls us “fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). He said, “You shall be My witnesses” (Acts 1:8). Paul told Timothy, “Do the work of an evangelist” (2 Timothy 4:5). Paul said, “We are ambassadors for Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:20). That's our calling. That's our job description. Every one of us has the responsibility, and the privilege, to testify to the reality of Jesus in our lives. So, if we really believe the Gospel is true, then we must make up our minds to live on mission.

***Lesson #2 – Respond to the Spirit's leading.*** “An angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Go south to the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ And he got up and went” (Acts 8:26-27, NIV). In Samaria, God used Philip to lead hundreds to Christ. Now, an angel directed him to a desert road. It didn't make sense to leave such a fruitful place, but Philip listened to the Holy Spirit. “He got up and he went.”

Paul reminds us of this when he said, “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25, NIV).<sup>12</sup> That's the key to sharing our faith. “Keep in step with the Spirit.” Let the Holy Spirit guide you and prompt you. It could be in a restaurant, in your neighborhood, at the office, or at a party, and you sense God prompting you to walk over to someone and start a conversation. We must be ready and willing to respond to the Spirit's leading.

***Lesson #3 – Look for opportunities and look for the person God is guiding you to talk to.*** Philip went, and “on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, ‘Go to that chariot and stay near it’” (Acts 8:27-29, NIV).<sup>13</sup>

The meeting between Philip and the Ethiopian was a divine appointment. God arranges divine appointments all the time and places non-believers in our path. We just have to be alert and see the opportunity and listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said, “Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest” (John 4:35, NIV). Jesus said people are ready. So look for opportunities. Look for the person God is guiding you to talk to.

***Lesson #4 – Initiate the conversation by asking questions.*** “Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ Philip asked” (Acts 8:30, NIV). There are good questions and there are bad questions. Don’t start by asking “Have you been washed in the blood?” or “Are you prepared for the Great White Throne judgment?” There are better questions than those. But why ask questions? Questions show you are interested. Questions are non-threatening. Questions give you insight into what a person thinks.

When I meet someone, I usually ask, “So, what do you do for a living?” Then they ask me what I do. And when I tell them I’m a pastor, they usually run away. Not really. But I purposely ask questions to show interest in them. I ask questions about their job and their family, and I talk about sports and the weather. Then I will come back around and say, “Yeah, I’m a pastor. What kind of church background do you have?” And depending on their response, I might ask, “Was that experience positive for you?” If not, I might ask, “What turned you off from religion?” or “So what do you believe now?” I might say, “Well, at our church, we believe ... Have you ever thought about it that way?” And then I might offer, “I’ve really enjoyed talking with you. Would you be open to getting together to talk about this some more?”

Asking questions shows you are genuinely interested. Listen to their story. Listening is the greatest form of love. Listen to their beliefs. Listen to their heart. Listening will help you determine if you need to build a “head bridge” or a “heart bridge.”<sup>14</sup> Asking questions will help guide the conversation to the Gospel.

***Lesson #5 – Just sit down and talk to people.*** When Philip asked if he understood what he was reading, the Ethiopian said, “How can I, unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him” (Acts 8:31, NIV).

I love snapshots in the Bible. “He invited Philip to come up and sit with him.” You can visualize the Ethiopian reaching down and helping Philip into the chariot. You can imagine them squeezing together on the chariot’s bench. You can imagine them reading the scroll as the chariot bounced along the road. I love how this verse simply says Philip sat with him.

Just sit down and talk to people. It’s about two people talking. Showing interest, being a friend. Asking questions, answering questions. The Ethiopian admitted what is true of every non-believer. “How can I understand unless someone explains it to me?” Every non-believer needs someone who will sit down and explain it to them.

***Lesson #6 – Open your mouth and say something.*** Again, don’t miss the simplicity of this. “Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him” (Acts 8:35, NAS). I believe it’s a cop-out to say, “I share my faith by the way I live.” Yes, God is honored

when we live good lives. But no one becomes a Christian by observing how good you are. The Gospel requires words. “Philip opened his mouth.”

When God called Moses to confront Pharaoh and demand the Hebrews be released from Egyptian slavery, Moses begged the Lord, “Please, don’t send me. I’m not eloquent. I wouldn’t know what to say. I get tongue-tied. Please Lord, not me.” But the Lord said, “Who has made man’s mouth? ... Is it not I, the Lord? Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say” (Exodus 4:11-12, NAS). And He will do the same for us. Just open your mouth and He will give you the words to say.

***Lesson #7 – Focus on Jesus.*** “Philip ... preached Jesus to him” (Acts 8:35, NAS).<sup>15</sup>

Non-believers are going to challenge you. They are going to complain about hypocrites in the church. They are going to complain about religion in politics. They are going to challenge your belief in creation. They are going to call you homophobic and narrow-minded. And you need to be ready to respond. But most important is focusing on Jesus. I believe it’s the love of Jesus, the sacrifice of Jesus, the forgiveness of Jesus that eventually melts a person’s heart and makes all those other issues fade away.

Acts 8 says, “The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture (from Isaiah 53), ‘He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth’ ... Then the eunuch asked Philip, ‘Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?’” (Acts 8:32-34, NIV). Isaiah 53 is about Jesus, and Philip told him about Jesus.

Tell people about Jesus. Tell them how much He loves them. Tell them that no matter what they have done Jesus is willing to forgive them of everything they have ever done wrong. Tell them that Jesus sacrificed His life on the cross for them, that He paid the penalty for their sin. Tell them that “there is salvation in no one else” (Acts 4:12, NAS). Tell them that Jesus is “the way, and the truth, and the life,” and that no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6, NAS).

The 2nd century bishop and historian Irenaeus wrote about the Ethiopian 100 years later. Names him Simeon Bachos, and writes, “This man went into the regions of Ethiopia, to preach what he had himself believed.”<sup>16</sup> History shows he was the first convert in Africa and that the Gospel spread through him. Why? Because Philip was looking for opportunities. Because Philip responded to the Holy Spirit’s leading. Because Philip sat with him. Because Philip opened his mouth. Because Philip focused on Jesus.

***Lesson #8 – Make up your mind to live your life on mission.*** After baptizing the Ethiopian, the Bible says, “The Lord snatched Philip away ... and Philip found himself at Azotus ... and he kept preaching the Gospel to all the cities” (Acts 8:39-40, NAS). Earlier in Acts 8, what was Philip doing? Preaching the Gospel. When he met the Ethiopian, what did Philip do? He shared the Gospel. After this divine appointment with the Ethiopian, what did Philip do? He “kept preaching the Gospel to all the cities” (Acts 8:40, NAS). And twenty years later, the Bible refers to him as “Philip the evangelist.”<sup>17</sup>

Philip made up his mind. He knew what he believed, he knew what he would die for, and he decided what he was going to live for. He made up his mind to live his life on mission. And that's a decision that each of us must make. We can learn a lot from Philip, and I hope you will keep these lessons in mind, and pray through these lessons until they become a way of life.

## CONCLUSION

In Paul's final words to the Colossians, he said, "Devote yourselves to prayer ... and pray that God may open a door for the message ... Proclaim it clearly ... Be wise in how you act toward outsiders. Make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (Colossians 4:2-6, paraphrase).

***Our simple prayer, and passionate prayer, should be, "Lord, give me an opportunity and give me the words to say."***

The question is – who? Who is God leading you to talk to? Who does God want you to tell them about Jesus? Who are you praying for? Who do you know and love and care about that needs Jesus? Who?

Again, a simple prayer. "Lord, please open the door for me to speak to \_\_\_\_\_. Give me an opportunity and give me the words to say. And may the Holy Spirit convict them of their need and convince them of the truth. As You open the door, may I open my mouth, and may You open their heart."

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Sadly, the evangelistic mission matters less in today's church than in any other time in my year's as a pastor. The recent articles I found on evangelism included "The Death of Evangelism" ... "The Tragic Demise of Evangelism" ... and "Why Christian Millennials Say Evangelism Is Wrong." The emphasis today is on leadership and strategy. On self-help and pop psychology over truth and Bible. Many pastors today prefer to be called cultural influencers. Websites, podcasts, and blogs are filled with theological curiosity, personal opinion, and dominated by heresy hunters. In all of it, there is little on evangelism.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970, 2003), pages 17, 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, page 274.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, page 282.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pages 293, 382.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, page 388.

<sup>7</sup> The Greek word for "devote" is προσκαρτερέω (*proskaptereo*), meaning doing something with intensity, persevering no matter the difficulty.

<sup>8</sup> See Acts 1:14, 2:42, 4:24, 4:31, 6:4.

<sup>9</sup> In Ephesians 6:18, Paul talked about praying with perseverance.

<sup>10</sup> See Acts 14:27, 1 Corinthians 16:9, 2 Corinthians 2:12, 2 Thessalonians 3:1.

<sup>11</sup> The number one excuse for not sharing our faith is fear. We're afraid of not knowing what to say. We're afraid of being ridiculed and rejected. But the greatest evangelist in the New Testament had more to fear than any of us. Following the stoning of Stephen, "a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem" (Acts 8:2, NIV). Jewish leaders threatened Christians, "This is what will happen to you if don't stop preaching about Jesus!" Christians were dragged from their homes and thrown into prison. They were threatened and even beaten. Acts 8 says they "scattered" in every direction. Families were on the run for their lives, dragging their children behind them. One of these men was Philip. "Philip the evangelist" (Acts 8:5, 21:8) is not to be confused with Philip the apostle (John 1:45). He was one of the seven men chosen to serve the Greek widows, highly respected and spiritually mature (Acts 6:1-5). Twenty years later, Paul and his team lodged at Philip's house, along with his four daughters (Acts 21:8-9). Yes, Philip was afraid, because he saw his good friend Stephen stoned to death. To us, this is a story with black letters on a white page. For Philip, his friend's body was lying in the dirt covered with blood. When it comes to sharing the Gospel, we fear we might offend someone. Philip feared he might be stoned to death. The greatest evangelist in the New Testament had more to fear than any of us. Acts 8 says, "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said ... and they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, and they were baptized" (Acts 8:4-6, 12, NIV). Something deep within Philip allowed him look into the face of persecution and keep preaching anyway. What was it? The resurrection of Jesus! Like Peter and John and Stephen, Philip was convinced it was true, he was compelled to talk about it, and he was courageous to take a stand at great risk.

<sup>12</sup> See also Romans 8:14.

<sup>13</sup> This man was an Ethiopian, an African, a foreigner. He was a highly trusted official of Queen Candace of Ethiopia, in charge of the royal treasury. He must have been personally rich because he owned his own scroll of Isaiah. He was also a eunuch, a castrated man in the queen's service, and eunuchs not allowed to fully participate in Jewish religious life because of their deformity. There were regulations regarding eunuchs in Deuteronomy 23:1. "No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord." Yet, this man had been to Jerusalem to worship. In other words, he was searching for the truth, he was seeking God.

<sup>14</sup> Norman Geisler and David Geisler, *Conversational Evangelism* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2009), page 111.

<sup>15</sup> In this divine appointment, Philip explained that Isaiah's prophecy was talking about Jesus. Then the Ethiopian said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him" (Acts 8:36-38, NAS). The NASB 1995 includes verse 37, while some versions do not. The reason is that Greek manuscripts from the 9th-12th centuries include verse 37, while most older manuscripts, dating as far back as the 2nd century, do not include verse 37. So, the consensus of scholarship is that verse 37 was not in the earliest manuscripts of Acts. This is one of a few copyist issues that exist through the generations, none of which alter the meaning of the text. However, the point of verse 37 is consistent with the rest of the New Testament. Belief before baptism. Baptism does not make someone a Christian, faith does. Baptism is not necessary to become a Christian. Baptism is symbolic, an outward sign of an inward reality. The Ethiopian's eagerness to be baptized was not so he could be saved, but because he had been saved during that chariot ride. The point is to make sure a person understands what it means to believe, to put their faith in Jesus, to accept Him as their Savior and Lord. Acts 8:27 referred to the man as an Ethiopian and as a eunuch. He was a foreigner and a eunuch. If Philip explained Isaiah 53 to him, it's probable that he also explained Isaiah 56 to him. Which says, "No *foreigner* who becomes a follower of the Lord should

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say, 'The Lord will certainly exclude me from his people.' The *eunuch* should not say, 'Look, I am like a dried-up tree.' For this is what the Lord says, "For the *eunuchs* who observe my Sabbaths and choose what pleases me and are faithful to my covenant, I will set up within my temple and my walls a monument (to them) that will be better than that of sons and daughters ... As for *foreigners* who become followers of the Lord and serve him, who love the name of the Lord and want to be his servants ... I will bring them to my holy mountain. I will make them happy in the temple where people pray to me. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar ..." (Isaiah 56:3-8, NET). When the Ethiopian read that, he would have surely said, "That's me! God accepts me!" Irenaeus wrote about the Ethiopian over 100 years later. Names him Simeon Bachos and writes, "This man went into the regions of Ethiopia, to preach what he had himself believed" (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III.12.8). History shows that he was the first convert in Africa and that the Gospel spread through him.

<sup>16</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III.12.8.

<sup>17</sup> See Acts 21:8.