

Lesson 8: Eager to Share *Colossians 4:2–18*

Hook



Main Point: We advance the gospel as the Church multiplies.

Paul asks the Colossian church to pray for the effectiveness of his gospel witness. He has invested much into this body of believers, and now he is asking that they partner together with him in prayer for gospel seeds to be planted. He wants the Colossians to follow his example and make the most of their conversations, relationships and evangelistic opportunities. We all have people whom we ask to pray for us and the people we're investing in. We have those friends we care deeply about and deeply desire for them to understand gospel truth and profess Christ. Prayer is key, as Paul understood. The great Puritan John Bunyan said this: You can do more than pray after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed (John, Bunyan, *Prayer*, 1999, p. 23, Banner of Truth, Carlisle, Pa.).

Use time with your group before you begin the lesson sharing a season in which you prayed fervently for a close friend, neighbor or coworker to come to Christ and used most of your opportunities to share the gospel with this person. Hearing these stories of the Lord's faithfulness encourages us to pray more often because it shows us that prayer truly works.

What is the hardest part about praying continuously for someone to come to know the Lord?

What stands in your way from making the most of daily opportunities to share your faith?

How have you been encouraged by asking close friends and family, maybe even people in this very group, to partner with you in prayer over these spiritual conversations?

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Book

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Text Summary: Paul closes out the letter to the Colossians reminding them to continue in prayer for Paul and his ministry. While Paul asks for prayer, he exhorts the Colossians to continue living in a manner worthy of the gospel, advancing the gospel with every opportunity. Paul spends the majority of the last chapter updating the Colossians on several of his ministry partners. By this example, we see that Paul has multiplied himself and truly given himself the ministry of the gospel.

Colossians 4:2–6 [Read]

Sub-Point 1: Pray that the lost would come to know Christ

What does Paul mean when he says to be watchful in prayer?

Paul begins to close his letter to the Colossians, and in these first five verses, he calls the Colossians to a life of prayer, but not just any prayer. Paul writes that the Colossians must be watchful in prayer. The verb Paul uses connotes the act of staying awake and keeping alert. There may be a parallel here to the behavior of the disciples in the garden, who, the night before Jesus' death, were unable to stay awake in prayer.

Paul urges prayer for the advancement of the gospel. For so long, Paul has been a source of encouragement for the Church; now Paul needs the Church to pray for him and support his ministry efforts in preaching the gospel elsewhere (vv. 3–4). Paul asks for prayer for himself, but then in calling the Colossians to pray for his preaching of the gospel, he exhorts them to be doing the same thing. In verse 5, he calls the Colossians to live wisely and use every opportunity they have to share the gospel with those who have yet to hear.

The Christian lifestyle was an important element to Christian evangelism. Bruce says, “It remains true that the reputation of the gospel is bound up with the behavior of those who claim to have experienced its saving power.”¹ The verb Paul uses in verse 5 for “making the best use of the time” literally means “buying up or buying out—to snap up every opportunity.”² In

¹ F. F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*. [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984], p. 174.

² N. T. Wright, *Tyndale New Testament Commentary: Colossians and Philemon*. [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986], p. 157.

this sense, Christians are to do whatever they can to grab every opportunity and use it for gospel witness.

What does speech that is gracious and seasoned with salt sound like?

Why is the way we speak about the gospel important for how someone responds to the gospel?

What ministries/believers do you pray for regularly? What do you pray for them?

In making the most of opportunities, Paul ends with commending how they speak to unbelievers. Paul knows the work of evangelism and how difficult it is. In this way, he calls the Colossians to be gracious and winsome with how they speak about the gospel and how they dialogue with non-Christians (v. 6). Here, Wright explains, “Paul knows that a tedious monologue is worse than useless in evangelism ... the argument may be won but the person lost.”³ Paul wants prayer to go before the efforts of ministry. He knows that prayer, appealing to the Lord’s strength and power, is what will make their ministry effective. Prayer is essential for the work of evangelism and seeing the lost come to a saving knowledge of Christ.

Why is prayer essential for the work of evangelism?

What attitude do you take when you share the gospel?

Describe the attitude/posture of the person who led you to Christ. What was that conversation like?

Colossians 4:7–14 [Read]

Sub-Point 2: Pray for gospel workers and the churches that support them.

Paul transitions in verse 7 to his final greetings. He uses this space to commend the work of his faithful workers and to remind the Colossians of these committed brothers. Paul mentions several co-laborers in verse 7–14.

How might knowing about the status of Paul and his fellow workers bring encouragement to the church in Colossae?

What gospel workers are you close to? How might you encourage them today?

He opens with Tychicus, who was a long brother in the faith whom Paul is sending back to update the Colossians on Paul’s status and to encourage them in their walks with Christ. This

³ Ibid.

reference parallels Ephesians 6:21–22 and scholars believe that Tychicus was responsible for delivering both the letters of Colossians and Ephesians to their respective churches.⁴ It's likely that Onesimus is the same Onesimus discussed in Philemon. With this being the case, as Paul referenced in verse 9, the Colossians already know him and has since come to faith since leaving Colossae. This is of great encouragement to the Colossians because Onesimus left a pagan and is returning a brother in Christ!

Paul then gives mention to Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus Justus (vv. 10–11). Paul says these men were the only Jewish Christians who served with him. It's evident that Paul found great comfort in their partnership. It's possible that Aristarchus was also imprisoned for the sake of the gospel just like Paul.⁵

Paul mentions Epaphras in verse 12 who was the servant to actually bring the gospel to Colossae and gave the word to Paul that a church had been planted there.⁶ Paul shows the faithfulness of Epaphras, still laboring in prayer for the body of the Colossian Christians. The nature of his prayer is right in line with Paul's main point throughout this letter: standing mature in Christ and living a life worthy of the gospel.

How does Paul describe Epaphras' prayer life on behalf of the Colossians in verse 12?

Paul gives a brief mention of Luke and Demas in verse 14. Nothing much more than this is known about Demas. There is mention of him in 2 Timothy 4 and all that is said about him is that he became a lover of the present world. This mention of Luke is the only mention in the New Testament noting his practice as a physician. Although many details of these men are left out, what Paul has done well in the conclusion of this letter is to show the faithfulness of God's servants. The gospel continues to spread by the faithfulness of His power at work in His people. This is how the gospel expands. And Paul wants the church at Colossae to know that the gospel continues to advance and their continued partnership in prayer for this movement is incredibly important. Just as Epaphras brought the gospel to them, these other ministers continue to take the gospel to those who have not yet heard.

Why might it be important for Paul to end his letter in this fashion?

Whom has God placed on your heart to share the gospel with soon? How are you praying for them?

Colossians 4:15–18 [Read]

⁴ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 176.

⁵ Wright, *Tyndale New Testament Commentary: Colossians and Philemon*, 162.

⁶ Ibid.

Sub-Point 3: Pray that churches would remain faithful to the gospel.

Why does Paul want to make sure this letter is read to the churches?

How would that build up the Church?

Paul sends his final greetings to the church in Laodicea, which was not far from Colossae. During this period of church history, many of these churches met in houses throughout the cities. It's likely that it was in Nympha's house where the church, or an important part of the church, gathered.⁷ The fact that Paul encourages his letters to be read to the bodies of believers shows that he intends for his letters to carry weight and authority in the church. Paul's exhortation here to read the letters isn't just about his authority over the church, but more importantly Christ's authority over the lives of Christians. Paul wants these brothers and sisters to remain faithful in the midst of false teaching.

Paul believes the Spirit empowered him with every word of every letter he wrote, and for that reason these letters must be used for the building up of the Church. Otherwise, Paul worked in vain. This church has been brought up in the fullness of Christ, and Paul wants their maturity to continue. His direct call to Archippus for faithfulness in ministry is his call to each member of each church body: fulfill the calling that you have received.

The call to remember his chains, in verse 18, is a call for prayer. Paul urges the continued partnership between him and the local churches, even if he is in prison. Paul's statement about writing with his own hand is a way of signing a letter in order to show his authorship and the letter's genuineness. The church must remember the suffering taking place for the sake of the gospel and as it remembers, the body must continue in prayer and continue sending faithful ministers to take the gospel to the world.

By closing with "Remember my chains," how does that help direct the Colossians' prayers on Paul's behalf?

How do you systematically pray for the persecuted Church? Do you have tools that help you in this endeavor?

How do you conduct your prayer time? What tools do you use to help?

⁷ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 183.

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Took

Main Point: We advance the gospel as the Church multiplies.

Paul writes directly to a faithful brother at the end of the letter to the Colossians and exhorts him to fulfill the ministry he has received in the Lord. This is a wonderful call to all believers. Secondly, it's a great encouragement to have a voice of a mentor in ministry give such an exhortation. Use your speech not only to share the gospel with those who have never heard, but also to encourage the work of the gospel in the lives of those who have heard and are walking with the Lord. Paul served so many others during his ministry and worked with many faithful servants directly. Use your voice and your life to encourage the work of the Lord that you see going on around you.

Challenges

Prepare others for ministry. It's evident that Paul disciplined others and multiplied himself well for the sake of the gospel. Not only should the Church make the most of every opportunity to share the gospel, but the Church must make the most of every opportunity to equip others for the gospel as well. Ask others and the Lord how you might use your time to help prepare others for gospel ministry.

Pray for others in ministry. The Church must pray for one another. That call is clear from these verses in Colossians. Make sure to have time each day where you are praying for others you know who are in ministry. Pray for their words, their relationships and their faithfulness. When you pray for them, send them a text or an e-mail, or even a phone call, to let them know you are praying for their gospel work.

Pray for opportunities for ministry. Another aspect of challenge from the conclusion of Colossians is that you would pray for yourself to have opportunities to serve Christ and help take the gospel to those who haven't heard. Maybe this is your work. Maybe this is your family. Maybe this is your friend group. Pray the Lord would give you opportunities to share in the mission of gospel advancement.