

Colossians 4 v 2 - 6

Big Question: How do we get ready to share Jesus?

Big Idea: Prayerful devotion provides the breeding ground for gospel conversation

Introduction

Our series continues today in the book of Colossians, and how we **can** be, how we **should** be Captivated by Christ.

The first half of the Colossians (chapters 1,2) teaches us to deepen our knowledge of Jesus, and the second half of the book (chapter 3,4) models what it looks like to do life as a Christian, with Jesus, which is where we find ourselves today in the book.

I hope this series has helped you, challenged you and encouraged you as we learn through the pages of the bible together.

Two weeks back, Pete unpacked what obedient living looks like in the household. What a right response to a holy God might look like – that being one of healthy obedience.

Last week our brother Scott Wilson shared Paul's instruction for masters and slaves – and how that plays out in our context today, in the workplace.

And today, we'll be looking at how we prepare to serve as ambassadors to the King in encouraging others. How we prepare in prayer, to share the gospel clearly through God-given opportunity.

The theme of Paul's letter to the Colossians is rooted in what we heard few months back, from Colossians chapter 2:

⁶So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

It should be no surprise, brothers and sisters, that to be rooted in Him, in order to be built up and strengthened in the faith and to be overflowing with thankfulness – to achieve all of that will require **serious** motivation. I think you will agree, our passage today sets up that motivation for us.

So lets get stuck in – open your bibles at Colossians chapter 4.

2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. 3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. 4 Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. 5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Instructions are not my strong suit. I don't know what it is – but it takes a lot of energy for me to open a new piece of furniture or flat pack and actually stop, read the instructions, and **then** get to work. It doesn't matter how many times I put a shelf together with a piece facing the wrong way, or mount a shelf upside down (Yes, that actually happened), I just struggle to bring myself to stop, read, understand and go. Maybe its because I see those instructions as some kind of authority, which suggests I have a problem with authority. My wife will tell you that I'm proud and stubborn. I blame that on my Dutch heritage - but that's just an excuse, I know.

The point is – instructions are given in a specific order and are meant to be followed for our good, to give us the **best** chance of the desired outcome.

These 5 verses in Colossians today - build on one-another...as Paul, quite methodically gives us direction on how we can best serve others, and specifically how we can serve **outsiders** with the gospel of the risen Christ.

If I can summarise Paul's call to the church, and to us today – is that **prayerful devotion provides the breeding ground for gospel conversation.**

This is what I want us to remember today. **Prayerful devotion provides the breeding ground for gospel conversation.**

We have 2 points today, the first is to **Communicate with the King**, looking at prayerful devotion in verses 2-4, followed by how we then might **Communicate with Others** in verses 5-6.

Main point 1: Communicate with the King

It is clear the apostle Paul had an incredible relationship with the living God. What made this relationship **so deep, so effective** for the gospel? Well, of the many Godly characteristics the apostle Paul models for us in scripture – **communion with God** is one that stands out. **Communication** with God – through prayer.

Prayer is this constant theme in Paul's ministry that underpins his instruction here to the Colossians, and the other churches receiving his letters. Paul's ability to know God **and** walk in His way ... was heavily influenced by his devotion to prayer.

We know Paul viewed prayer as a priority because he tells us! Over 40 times he mentions prayer in his letters.

Paul makes no secret of his reliance on prayer either, as he opens the letter to the Colossians “We **always** thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ **when** we pray for you” and then in verse 9 he makes the point again that

“we **have not stopped** praying for you. We **continually** ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will...”

These words read like the marks of a devoted man. A motivated man. Motivated by something, someone **far greater** than himself.

What are you motivated by this morning? What characterises your walk with God? For Paul, it was Jesus. Prayer was the outworking of that motivation.

One of the commentaries which Ben and a few of us have used as a reference in this series is John Woodhouse' Focus on the Bible Series. Listen to what he says about what was driving Paul's devout prayer life:

Paul prayed, not simply as a spiritual exercise or discipline, and certainly not in order to move an inactive God into action. Paul prayed because of the extraordinary work that God **had done** and that God **was doing**. (Woodhouse, 2011, p. 242)

What is it that God had done, that drove Paul's committed prayer life? The good news of Jesus, that's what!

We have heard for a few weeks now how God had brought order to a world of chaos through his Son, Jesus – through his life, death and resurrection. Paul was living his life in response to Jesus' devotion to the Father's will, which was to fulfil God's plan – the redemption of sinners.

Paul wasn't motivated by a legalistic rule-keeping ritual-demanding God, he was driven to prayer because he had been given a transformed heart, a heart infused by the good news of Jesus and fuelled by genuine thankfulness. But there is also a sense of persistent **desperation** in Paul's prayer. Pleading with God to do what only God was able to do. And so should we.

Obedience and devotion to faithful prayer was not a duty but a way of life for the apostle Paul. A life **hungry** to see the gospel shared.

Friends when we are in awe of the extraordinary God we serve – we **must, surely** – be driven to action, and that starts with prayer. If we truly believe it is only HE who can bring about order and restoration, that it is ONLY Jesus who can **initiate** the heart transformation in the life of a sinner – then surely we **cling** to God and plead with him to do His work.

So, for Paul, the advancement of the gospel was the ultimate motivation to pray. The same goes for us today in response to the work He has done in us already.

Devoted prayer should be the natural response in a life that is Captivated by Christ.

What about us here at Grace Bible Church Corinda? As a church **have we** made corporate prayer a priority? I don't mean just on a Sunday morning – I mean stitched into the fabric of our ministry schedules and planning. I don't think we have, certainly not as well as we should.

We long to see the lost saved. Are we satisfied with the gospel transformation in the lives of sinners in the last 5 years? Speaking plainly, I don't think we should be satisfied.

I can't help but ask the question – is there some connection between the devoted prayer life the Christian church is called to, and the effective outworking of the mission for us to see the lost saved in our community? I think there is.

(sigh)

Those are tough questions. Personally I don't like asking them. Probably because I don't like the answers to them. But important questions, some of which we have wrestled with lately as elders.

Where do we turn to? What do we do about it? Well Paul calls us, right here – to action, prayerful action.

Where are **you at** with your prayer life this morning in light of this verse?

Perhaps you're tempted to say you don't quite 'get' what he means by devotion. How many times, how often, how long, where – maybe you want more specifics.

I don't think the real problem is us not knowing how to pray, or how much or how long – but rather giving up what has become, for most of us - unhealthy habits of excessive devotion elsewhere.

We all have things we are devoted to – its not a foreign concept.

Statistics tell us people are spending 2 hours 22 minutes a day socialising on social media networks. That's across 3.2 billion people actively using these networks every day. Now, I'm not saying you have to close down your insta account, or even that social media is wrong – what I'm talking about is devotion, friends...devotion wrongly placed.

Maybe for you, its Fortnite or Minecraft or just surfing the net or perhaps its work that you are devoted to? I'm pretty devoted to my rugby team – and in these last few weeks, the temptation is stronger than ever to veg out in front of the TV to watch the Springboks take out the All Blacks.

Jokes aside, if you had to weigh your prayer life against some of these other things – where would it feature? **Would** it even feature? I find it challenging, maybe you do too.

As a church, do we make prayer the priority that we preach it should be from this very pulpit? Friends, I don't think we do. And I feel like a hypocrite calling you to do something that I know full well we haven't modelled very well for you.

Okay lets pause here. That's a lot to digest. Its heavy. But let me say this -

Paul does not attempt to guilt his readers into action. Nor is that what I am trying to do here today. If you walk away today, merely despondent and guilted then I have failed in my obligation to faithfully teach you from God's Word.

Paul **motivates** his readers **into action** by reminding them of the Gospel victory that is Christ and the Gospel mission that is to see that message shared with others. My

prayer for you, for us – is that we are motivated by this same reason – because of the Lord Jesus Christ. Spur one-another on as we run this race, together.

Finally in this verse, Paul gives us 2 practical guidelines to shape what devoted prayer looks like. Read with me in your bibles, verse 2 again – he says “Devote yourself to prayer, being Watchful and Thankful.

The first guideline is to be “Watchful” which is the word the NIV uses. The CSB uses the phrase to “Stay alert”. I understand ‘Watchful’ as being “on the lookout,” where in bible times the watchmen would be on duty on their posts, watchful for enemies. To do that, you needed to be awake for starters.

Here, Paul is calling us to not be falling asleep when we pray – but calls us to be **alert, aware** of what’s going on around us.

We pray for those we love. Our children, our spouse, ourselves. To be watchful in our prayer might require us to love our community more and perhaps if we don’t pray for our community then we might need to ask God to help us love our family, church family, community, country – and especially those among us on our frontlines searching for the true hope that Jesus offers.

Staying alert should also keep perspective of the bigger picture, that we have been raised with Christ, that the work of making salvation possible has been finished, at the cross.

We should be energised to pray with **expectation** that the God of the universe hears us, and He is able to exercise His will to deal with ANY situation.

And the second guideline in this verse is to pray with a “Thankful” heart. Verse 17 of chapter 3 summarises the Christian life “And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” – the theme of thankfulness is part of what keeps Paul focussed on God, and structures his call to prayer.

Sometimes, this will feel a lot harder than others. How do you go about thanking God for a trial that you are going through, for example? That can be incredibly difficult to do, but the way the bible teaches us to pray might go something like *“Lord, you know how hurt I feel and I don’t understand why this trial has been thrust upon me. But I am so thankful that as Almighty God you do understand, and that the reasons why, are not for me to know at this point. Remind me that somehow you will work this out for good – help me be a witness to others as I suffer through this, and to find my joy in You “*

Paul knows that charging God’s people to deliberately be thankful as they pray is the mark of a healthy prayer life, and the way in which we can reflect on God’s goodness that is at work every day.

Devoted prayer is the prerequisite to a thriving walk with Christ, and the breeding ground for gospel opportunity. Which leads us straight into verse 3, read with me:

³ And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.

As is so common, Paul's concern here, first and foremost is for others – but he is acutely aware of his own need for God to be at work in and through him during his time in prison.

He urges the church to remember to pray for him and those working with him, in their God-given mission of proclaiming the gospel of the risen Christ.

Paul is just so in-tune with being 'on mission' for God in what must have been a very uncomfortable circumstance - being unable to leave where he was being housed. But he prays for opportunity, not for more comfort, not for the prison doors to be opened but rather – he prays for opportunity for doors to be opened **for the gospel!**

Paul knows that prayer is the means that God has given him to prepare the way for the gospel to go forth. Paul prayed that he might not be discouraged in his ministry, nor driven from it because of his sufferings.

Ministry is a tough job. There are times of discouragement and times of joy – these chains Paul speaks of are probably physical, but he finds joy not in his circumstance but in being in chains in service of the King, and finds joy in the hope of seeing the lost saved.

I encourage you today, in whatever bondage or circumstance you find yourself...stop. Lift your gaze to the glorious face of the saviour, and come to him with an alert mind, with thankfulness – and wait to see what the Lord will do in the lives of those around you.

Those of us who know the Lord as saviour and king. We long to see this mystery of Christ which arrested us – also arrest others. But what are we willing to do to make that happen, friends?

- **Prayerful Preparation**
 - a. Pray for opportunities.
 - b. Write down and practice your testimony of how you came to know Jesus. It doesn't need to be eloquently written; it should be natural – and delivered from your heart. Share it with a brother or sister. Ask them if the gospel is evident and clear.
- **Prayerful Readiness**
 - a. That opportunity you're searching for will probably not come in the shape you expect it to. And that's okay, because God has told us that He will never leave us or forsake us.
- **Prayerful Relationships**

- a. Be on the lookout for opportunities to deepen a relationship, ask how you can help someone who you know is doing it tough. You'll be surprised what you find when you're actively looking.

Friends, we need devoted communion with God if we are to bear gospel fruit.

Prayerful devotion provides the breeding ground for gospel conversation. **B]**

Then when the opportunity arises, Paul wants us to proclaim the gospel clearly, and simply. In verse 4:

⁴ Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

The gospel is simple. Paul summarises it for us in chapter 1:

“Our Lord Jesus Christ is the one through whom and for whom all things have been made, and by his death on the cross God has reconciled all things to him.”

The gospel message here is simply stated and biblically accurate. But if you recall in the previous verse, Paul describes what he is preaching as a mystery, the “mystery of Christ, for which he is in chains”.

You might find yourself a bit confused here. How do you preach something that is a mystery, with clarity?

The revealing of the mystery of Christ must occur in the heart and mind of the sinner, this revealing is something which only God can do. That is not something which God has made your job!

Your job – is to proclaim the mystery of Christ, which is the simple gospel message, and to do so faithfully and accurately.

Your job is to strive at living a life worthy of having had that mystery of Christ revealed to you and your heart! That means that every facet of your life should be characterised by the love, care, grace and forgiveness shown you by God when you were saved!

And again, your witness matters, to those in your households, in your church, with your neighbours, colleagues and friends ... and in today's age – especially on your social networks.

So, Paul calls us to Communicate with the King, to pray with **intention**, so that we **love** others by sharing the good news **clearly** and **simply**.

Which leads us to our 2nd and final point this morning to **Communicate with others**.

Main Point 2 - Communicate with others

To be winsome in conversation with outsiders requires God-given wisdom, which Paul charges us with in verse 5 to be ‘wise’. Wisdom is often described as ‘applied knowledge’ – putting what you've learned (in God's Word in this case), into action.\

⁵ **Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.**

In term 2 at Homegroup we finished the series “6 steps to loving your church”. I’m really thankful for the conversations and insights we were able to share together.

One of the topics was about Loving Outsiders. Gospel ministry, friends, done the way the bible teaches us is not only the work of the paid workers in the church, often called the **few** – it is the work of those in the **pew**. That’s you this morning.

How you live, how you act, what you say, how you say it – especially when it comes to outsiders should reflect the new creation that you are, and the transformed heart of someone captivated by Christ. Outsiders see this and are influenced by it.

In his address to the church at Ephesus Paul writes in Ephesians chapter 6 verse 18-20:

Pray in the Spirit at **all times**, with **every** kind of prayer and petition. To this end, **stay alert** with all **perseverance** in your prayers for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, divine utterance may be given me, so that I will boldly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it fearlessly, as I should.

There is actually a lot of in common between this passage and our first point – in his call to make prayer a priority, and then boldly proclaiming the mystery of Christ. Paul calls himself an **ambassador in chains**, and asks for prayer to proclaim it fearlessly – **I just love that passion!**

Paul sees himself as an ambassador of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And if you’re a believer this morning, so should you!

Paul is not telling us here to be perfect. Paul is not telling us to be someone else when we’re around outsiders. Paul is reminding us of our new identity in Christ.

Paul is telling us to challenge ourselves about our **witness** as we **talk the talk**, but as importantly as we also **walk the walk**.

⁵ **Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.**

I think what Paul is saying here is that character matters, how you show love to others – in what, when and how you act has a direct impact on the effectiveness of the opportunity afforded to you. **Every** opportunity, he says...by making the best use of time. What does that look like?

Let me share a story with you that a family in our homegroup recently shared. This family had invited a non-Christian mum from school over for dinner. Her husband

had a severe health issue and was not around. As they all sat down for dinner, Jim shared the almost 'awkward' decision to be made whether they should say grace or not, knowing it might make their guest uncomfortable. He decided to pray.

Jim made a point of thanking the Lord for his provision and then went on to pray intentionally for the visiting family, and especially for the husband who was very ill. They had dinner and that was the end of it. The following day, Jim's wife received a follow up phone call from the visiting mum, who called specifically to say how much she appreciated the prayer that was said the night before. She said she had never experienced someone caring like that. Friends, now that is a GREAT example of witnessing in a deliberate way – making use of the seemingly small insignificant opportunity. God is at work in all!

The point is to be ready. Pray in the moment, and then step out and strike up a conversation. That is the opportunity that Paul is talking about here – that is what God has given you, so make the most of the moments. Be motivated by through Christ-centred, gospel-driven love for the lost on your front line.

Paul carries on in verse 6 to instruct us also to use our words in a winsome way for the gospel:

<p>⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.</p>

Paul would've known his audience well. They would have consisted of a range of staunch Jews who despised the gospel, fiery romans seeking to destroy anything that would threaten the empire, and then those within the church's community – the scared, the lost, the broken, the sick.

In one way, we're no different today in that we have a range of opinions, preferences that influence how we interact with those around us in society. We have the same here within the church too –we were reminded of a few weeks back – it is through the **radical gospel message** and **transformed hearts** that unity is fostered between us. That unity is driven and motivated by one thing, friends – union in Jesus Christ.

This last verse calls us to reflect on and represent the grace that we have been shown in Jesus and the forgiveness offered through Him. We are to outwardly ooze what we experience inwardly in the church.

If we're not experiencing that today, well then we've got work to do!

How do you stack up when it comes to conversations with each other here? Can I ask you, to pay attention to how you speak to one-another?

If we don't experience and show grace INwardly here amongst each other, then we're wasting our time trying to reflect something else OUTwardly.

The apostle Paul offers tongue-taming advice to help with this, to speak only the truth (Ephesians 4:25). But friends, this is **not** a license to be painfully blunt.

Paul goes on to we should “not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up” (v. 29).

Is this easy? Not if we attempt to do it on our own. Paul says here for our speech to always be gracious. To walk in wisdom, to speak in grace.

Paul knows that while we’ve all been made unique – we shared a common characteristic in that our default position is to think of ourselves and we can be careless with our words.

Tone, body language, volume, personal space, facial expressions, gestures – all these things play a vital part in communication. Paul is calling Christians here, to **show grace** in conversation – and when gracious speech is that we are striving for - then the rest of these ‘behavioural things’, fall into place. What drives your conversation with others, comes from what is in your heart.

If I can share a personal story here - my face speaks volumes, and I have been told on numerous occasions that people very quickly can tell what I’m thinking before I even get a chance to verbalise it. This creates a bit of a problem – but one that is worth thinking through – why?

I’ve been lovingly nudged at times – and told “you better fix your face” All I’m trying to share here, is how we communicate can often come from more than just our words.

Part of me goes “aaah well that’s just me – I cant change that.” Nonsense, that kind of posture doesn’t line up with verse 6, not even close. Paul tells us to ‘let our conversation be **always** full of grace’.

I might not be able to completely stop – but I think very often – what people see on my face is actually what is in my heart.

I think that’s what Paul is getting to hear – is that if our heart is right, clothed in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience¹ ... then we will see conversations **blossom**.

We all have our own quirks and habits – but think about what that might mean for you. Maybe for you this means stopping to take the time to actively listen. Possibly not speak as much, to ask about others’ lives and not talk about your own so much, dig deeper out of love for the person, be curious – ask questions.

The instruction here is not optional. Verse 6 reads very simply – for our interaction with others to **always** be **full** of grace. Challenge yourself to always show grace, even when others don’t or chose not to. That is what Jesus did.

¹ Colossians 3:12-15

⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, **seasoned with salt**, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

There is some contention with what exactly the reference Paul uses when referring to salt here.

Salt, in bible times was used to preserve things, like food. This might be applied in that our words should preserve others, not destroy them.

Jesus called believers the 'salt of the earth' and warned against losing the saltiness that goes with it.

Then there are idioms in contemporary Greek that allude to 'Salty Speech' being 'interesting, lively and colourful' speech.

Other prominent preachers like John Piper position the use of salt so that outsiders might 'thirst' for the living water of the gospel that they hear from us and see lived out.

Woodhouse summarises it well to say "Speech that is flavoured with your knowledge of God's grace will be salty. It will be significant, have effects and do good." (Woodhouse, 2011, p. 256).

Our conversation is to be **winsome** for the gospel, shared in a way that is biblically accurate and communicated in love.

Lastly – our charge is to be wise in the putting our gospel knowledge into practice through our words, so that we can serve others...outsiders well.

The ESV translates this to "how you **ought** to answer each person."

Our answer to 'everyone' needs to be **appropriate** in HOW we say it and **accurate** in WHAT we say. Both are equally important and we're not to water down the gospel or God's word – but we can communicate it being full of grace - seasoned with salt.

Allow others to ask questions – this is a great way to evangelise. Evangelise others by listening to them! And then, you will understand them better, what their fears and challenges, hopes and dreams are. Surely that would be a better way of knowing how to answer, rather than you do all the talking.

This verse doesn't say we must have all the answers right there. So don't take on that pressure! We often, mistakenly think that to be an effective evangelist we need to know all the answers to every curly question. That is simply not true, and is not what the bible teaches nor expects from you.

But if there's ever a line to remember, that you can ask that I think encapsulates conversation seasoned with salt it'd be "Tell me, how can I pray for you this week?". This is non-confrontational but curiously caring, and people seldom turn down an offer to pray.

Yes, we require wisdom from above to do this well. But it is doable.

As we come to a close today, Paul knows his audience needs God's help, and that starts with prayer, devoted prayer. The instructions in Colossians 4 are for our good, and for the good of those we are to serve, for the glory of the King.

Communicate with the King – so we can graciously communicate with others.

Prayerful devotion provides the breeding ground for gospel conversation.
