

Proclaiming Faith

April 13, 2025

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Colossians 4:2-18

Session Outline

1. Open Doors (Colossians 4:2-4)
2. Act Wisely (Colossians 4:5-6)
3. Final Greetings (Colossians 4:7-18)

Theological Theme

Our text today includes important instructions for approaching prayer and sharing the gospel. Believers are to treat prayer as a serious matter and set the gospel as a priority, acting and speaking wisely and praying that God will open doors for His message to be shared.

Call to Action

Every believer has a sphere of influence. Ask God to “open doors” for gospel conversations with the lost and searching. Write down one to three names of people in your life that do not know Jesus as Savior. Begin praying for them and ask God to use you to reach them.



Leader Guide

Proclaiming Christ

Introduction

In 1940, Wilma Rudolph was born in Saint Bethlehem, Tennessee. As a young child, she survived polio, scarlet fever, and double pneumonia. Even though she survived, she was left with a bleak diagnosis: Her left leg was paralyzed, and her doctor told her she would never walk again. However, her mother told her she would, and Wilma chose to believe her. Under the care of her family, Wilma refused to give up and slowly regained use of her leg. Despite her doctor's projection, she did, in fact walk again, and not only did she walk, but by her teen years, she had turned to athletics. In 1956, she went to the Olympics for the first time, returning home with a bronze medal. She would return to the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome, taking home gold medals and breaking three world records. This was all because she didn't give up when the odds were against her.¹

Our text today opens with a call for believers to adopt a similar spirit when it comes to prayer: to devote ourselves to it in such a way that we pray and don't give up, even when the odds are against us.

- ❓ Can you think of a time when you did not give up even though the odds were seemingly stacked against you? What happened?
- ❓ Why is this type of attitude important for the Christian life?

Session Summary

We have reached the end of Paul's letter to the Colossian church. As he concluded his letter, he gave important instructions around prayer, and made a prayer request for himself: that doors would be opened for him to share the gospel as he was called. Paul also gave instruction to help the Colossian believers share the gospel by living and speaking wisely. Paul ended his letter with final greetings for the body of believers at Colossae.

1. Open Doors (Colossians 4:2-4)

- ❓ What does it mean to devote ourselves to prayer and be alert in it (v. 2)? What does this look like?



What role does prayer play in sharing the gospel?

The heading above Colossians 4:2-6 in the CSB Study Bible is “Speaking to God and Others.” Both speaking to God and intentionally speaking to others with the Great Commission in mind are essential parts of living a faithful Christian life. Paul addressed both as he closed out his letter to the Colossians.

In our study of Colossians, we’ve already seen the emphasis Paul placed on prayer. Paul modeled a robust prayer life; it was an integral part of his ministry. In chapter 1, we learned that Paul continually prayed for the Colossian congregation and their spiritual maturity after he learned about them. Paul was deeply devoted to prayer because he understood the importance of it. He instructed the Colossian believers to approach prayer with equal seriousness.

Do you remember Jesus’s parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18? The widow in the parable, who had been treated unjustly—both by her “adversary” and by the judge, who should have overseen justice being done—wouldn’t give up in her quest for justice. She kept coming back to the unjust judge who kept refusing her. Eventually, she came back to the judge so many times that he became weary of her visits and gave in. Even in the face of unfair odds and a grim outlook, the widow refused to give up. Luke’s gospel account records that Jesus taught this parable “to show them that they should always pray and not give up” (Luke 18:1 NIV).

This is the type of devotion Paul had in mind in Colossians 4. When we devote ourselves to prayer, this is what it should look like. We are called to be persistent to the point that it doesn’t make sense in the eyes of the nonbeliever. This is the type of prayer that the early church modeled (Acts 1:14; 2:46).

Paul gave the same instruction in another way in 1 Thessalonians 5:17: “pray constantly.” This call to devote ourselves to prayer isn’t a literal mandate, it’s a life posture. Devotion to prayer means prayer is integrated into your daily life; it’s something you naturally turn to. When things are going well, you naturally thank God in prayer. When you encounter difficult situations, you naturally go to God for help. And every minute in between, prayer feels natural. Building this habit can sometimes feel tough. So, remember Jesus’s teaching to pray and not give up. God hears and answers our prayers even when the answer isn’t what we hope for.

The instruction to “stay alert” means that we are to be watchful and expectant in our prayers.² Staying alert is part of taking prayer seriously, as Jesus and Paul did. Though God doesn’t always answer our prayers the

Exercise Wisdom and Love

This section concludes with further instructions to continue in prayer and to conduct themselves in a worthy manner toward others. Believers’ conduct and speech should be carefully controlled and used with great wisdom and love.

way we hope, Scripture tells us that “he hears the prayer of the righteous” (Proverbs 15:29b). An expectant attitude toward prayer recognizes that God is listening and working things together for our good (Romans 8:28).

In our study of Colossians, we have already seen Paul’s posture of thanksgiving in prayer, and he instructed the Colossian believers to approach prayer similarly here (see also Philippians 4:6). The list of things to thank the Lord for is never ending. Every good thing we have is a gift, a blessing from God (James 1:17). When we understand this truth, we continually turn to God in prayer with thankful hearts.

Paul went on to ask the Colossian believers for prayer. Notice that, though Paul was in prison, he didn’t ask them to pray for his release. No, Paul had a different priority in mind: the spread of the gospel. Paul asked the Colossian believers to “pray also for us that God may open a door to us for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ” (v. 3). Paul was in prison for sharing the gospel and asked for prayer to open doors so he could share the gospel even wider.

Paul’s life was defined by serious dedication to the Great Commission. Paul knew the importance of this command from Jesus (v. 4). Today, we look at Paul’s life and ministry with admiration, but do we seek to live similarly? Are we praying for God to open doors so we can share the gospel too? Paul did not seek convenience or his own comfort; he sought to glorify God and share the good news.

How are you living in light of the Great Commission? Are you praying for open doors and the confidence to walk through them or hoping to fulfill the minimum requirement of this commission? Proclaiming the gospel can feel scary, but Jesus issued a command to all believers when He gave us the Great Commission, and we are called to walk in faithful obedience.

 Application: Where has God opened doors for you to share the truth about Jesus with others? How are you responding?

2. Act Wisely (Colossians 4:5-6)

 What do you think it means to “act wisely toward outsiders” (v.5)?

 How would you summarize Paul’s instruction regarding speech in verse 6?

In these verses, Paul instructed us to “act wisely toward outsiders” (v.5), but what does that mean? Remember the priority Paul placed on the gospel.

When we act wisely as Paul instructed, we understand that our actions affect the witness we offer, and we act accordingly.

Paul presented a similar idea in 1 Corinthians 10:23-24: “Everything is permissible,’ but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible,’ but not everything builds up. No one is to seek his own good, but the good of the other person.”

When we act wisely, we seek the good of others. We understand while some behaviors and activities may technically be permissible by biblical standards, that doesn’t always mean we should participate in them. If we hurt our ability to witness and share the gospel, or we know our actions could present a stumbling block for other believers, Scripture says we should abstain from these things. This is part of denying ourselves and following Jesus.

When we take the gospel seriously, we act wisely and make the most of the moments we have, using them to glorify God. When Jesus and His commands are our priority, this is how we should operate. Sometimes this looks like inviting an unbelieving coworker to church. Sometimes this looks like sharing how God is working in your life. Sometimes this looks like asking the drive through worker how you can be praying for them. The best way to make the most of our time, though, is to seek to be in tune with how the Holy Spirit is speaking to us so when He opens a door, we recognize His prompting and faithfully obey. We pursue this type of awareness through disciplines like prayer, biblical meditation, reading Scripture, time alone with God, and so on.

Part of acting wisely and making the most of all moments when it comes to sharing the gospel is not only watching the way we behave but also watching the way we speak. Paul noted that our speech should be “gracious, seasoned with salt” (v. 6). God extended grace to us, and we should extend that grace to those we speak to like Jesus did. Our words should be kind and uplifting, never tearing down or sowing conflict and division.

In a biblical sense, “grace” means getting something that we don’t deserve. Like salvation, we can’t earn grace; it is a gift freely given to us (Ephesians 2:8-9). When we apply that to how we speak to others, that may look like speaking kindly and calmly to someone who is rude or refusing to gossip even when someone treats us unfairly. What we say—or don’t say—should set us apart. It should indicate that something is different about us and point others to Jesus.

- Application: How can we pursue careful and intentional speech daily?

3. Final Greetings (Colossians 4:7-18)

- What does this passage teach us about how Paul approached sharing the gospel?
- What can we learn about Christian community from this passage?

Paul knew relationships are a first step to sharing the good news, and he put in the work to build them everywhere he went. To close his letter, Paul mentioned several of these relationships.

Tychius accompanied Paul when he left Ephesus (Acts 20:4),³ and Paul sent him with Onesimus to deliver this letter and an update on Paul's life and ministry. Onesimus was the runaway slave Paul supported in his letter to Philemon. Paul highly commended both men in his letter.

Paul also included greetings from faithful Jewish believers Aristarchus, another of Paul's "traveling companions" (Acts 19:29); John Mark, the gospel writer, who Paul and Barnabas quarreled over in Acts 15:36-41; and "Jesus who is called Justus" (v.11).

Paul's next three mentions referenced Gentile believers: Epaphras, who we previously learned alerted Paul to the situation brewing in Colossae; Luke, the writer of the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts; and Demas, who is also mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:10.

Paul named Nympha in verse 15, a woman who hosted a body of believers in her home in Laodicea. Households were generally run by women at this time, so she would have had an important role in this house church. Believers did not meet in buildings like we know today until later in church history.

This also gives us a glimpse into what happened with Paul's letters. They would have been read at a gathering of congregation members by the letter carrier Paul selected, and scholars believe letter carriers like this would have been specifically coached by Paul on how to deliver the letter and answer questions that came up during its reading. In this case, it was to be read first in Colossae, then shared with the believers at Laodicea. The letter addressed to the Laodiceans that Paul referenced in verse 16 "has not been preserved."⁴

It's possible Archippus was Philemon's son and pastored the church meeting in his father's home.⁵ We don't know this for sure, but whatever his situation was, Paul sought to encourage him here.

It was common in Paul's day to use a secretary to pen letters like this, but Paul sometimes signed letters himself, as he did here. The fitting final touch on his letter was a wish for grace.

- Application: How can our group be more intentional about relationship building with a goal of sharing the gospel in our lives?

Conclusion

- Does prayer feel natural to you? If yes, share how have you integrated it into your life. If not, share how and why you think you struggle.
- Write down one to three names of people in your life that do not know Jesus as Savior. This week, begin praying for them and ask God to use you to reach them.
- What are some ways we can work to be more gracious and seasoned in our speech? How do you struggle with this?

Prayer of Response

Lord, thank You for the truth You revealed to us in our study of the book of Colossians. Help us to live our lives with a dedication to seeking the doors You open for us to walk through and share the gospel. Give us courage and confidence as we make the most of our time, acting and speaking wisely in ways that point to You.

Memory Verse

Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving.
—Colossians 4:2

Additional Resources

- *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* by Douglas Moo
- *Philippians, Colossians & Philemon* by Richard Melick
- *Be Complete* by Warren Wiersbe

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of Colossians

Purpose

Paul wrote to counter the “Colossian heresy” that he considered an affront to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The false teaching is identified as a “philosophy” (2:8), presumably drawn from some Hellenistic traditions as indicated by the references to “his fullness” (1:19); the “elements of the world” (Gk *stoicheia*, 2:8, 20); “wisdom” (2:3, 23); and “self-made religion” (2:23). In addition, the false teaching contained Jewish elements such as circumcision (2:11; 3:11); “human tradition” (2:8); Sabbath observance, food regulations, festival participation (2:16); the “worship of angels” together with “access to a visionary realm” (2:18); and harsh human regulations (2:21–23). Paul addressed this syncretistic philosophy by setting forth a proper understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ and by noting appropriate implications for Christian conduct.

Author

The Apostle Paul is identified as the author of Colossians (1:1; 4:18). The church fathers unreservedly endorsed Pauline authorship (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 3.14.1; Tertullian, *De Praescr. Haer.*, 7; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.*, 1.1; cp. Justin, *Dialogue*, 85.2; 138.2). A close reading of Colossians reveals a considerable number of lexical, grammatical, and theological similarities with the other Pauline writings (1:9, 26; 2:11–14, 16, 20–21; 3:1, 3, 5–17). Also favoring the authenticity of Colossians as a letter of Paul is its close connection with Philemon, an epistle widely regarded as Pauline.

Setting

During his ministry in Ephesus (Ac 19:10), Paul sent Epaphras to spread the gospel in the Lycus Valley. Epaphras subsequently established the church at Colossae (1:7; 4:12–13). The city’s population consisted mostly of Phrygians and Greeks, but it also included a significant number of Jews. The church, likewise, was mostly composed of Gentiles (1:21, 27; 2:13), but it also had Jewish members (2:11, 16, 18, 21; 3:11). When Epaphras (Phm 23) informed Paul of certain heretical teachings that had spread there, Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians as a theological antidote.

Special Features

Paul’s letter to the church at Colossae is one of the prison letters (along with Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon). Paul’s desire with this letter was to correct the false teachings that were cropping up in the church. In doing so, Paul presented a clear picture of Jesus Christ as supreme Lord of the universe, head of the church, and the only one through whom forgiveness is possible.

Extended Commentary

Colossians 4:2-18

4:2 Stay alert or “staying awake” refers to the mental attitude of expectancy and watchfulness.

4:3–4 An open door was a common expression for an opportunity for someone to do something (Ac 14:27; 1Co 16:9; 2Co 2:12). Paul asked believers to intercede for him so he could continue to spread the gospel. On mystery, see 1:26.

4:5–6 Paul’s final exhortation to the Colossians was that they would use wisdom in their interaction with unbelievers (1:9–10). The phrase making the most comes from a verb meaning “to buy up,” as if finding a bargain. Here it conveys the idea of making the most of one’s time spent with unbelievers.

4:7–8 Tychicus, a native of Asia, first joined Paul in Ac 20:4 and continued to serve alongside him (Eph 6:21; 2Tm 4:12; Ti 3:12). He may also have been the person who delivered this letter to the Colossians as well as the letter to the Laodiceans (see note at Col 4:16).

4:9 Onesimus, a native of Colossae, was a runaway slave (Phm 10). His name means “useful.”

4:10–11 Aristarchus, a native of Thessalonica, was one of Paul’s companions and his fellow prisoner (Ac 19:29; 20:4). John Mark, the Gospel writer, joined Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Ac 12:12, 25). Paul and Barnabas parted ways because Paul did not want Mark along for their second journey (Ac 15:37–39). These verses provide evidence that at some point Paul became convinced again of Mark’s usefulness. Jesus who is called Justus was a fellow Jewish believer.

4:12–13 On Epaphras, see 1:7–8.

4:14 This is the only place in the NT where Luke’s profession is identified. Demas, one of Paul’s companions, later abandoned the gospel ministry because of his love for the world (2Tm 4:10).

4:15 Laodicea, ten miles from Colossae, also had a fledgling congregation of believers. Paul specifically mentioned Nympha, in whose home the Laodicean church met.

4:16 Once this letter had been read among the Colossian believers, they were to send it or a copy of it to Laodicea. Paul apparently wrote a letter to the Laodiceans that was also to be read in Colossae. The epistle to the Laodiceans was either another of Paul’s epistles (Ephesians?) or a letter that has not been preserved.

4:17 On Archippus, see Phm 2.

4:18 Although Paul probably used a secretary to write this epistle (cp. Rm 16:22), he often signed his letters himself as a mark of their authenticity and his affection for the recipients (1Co 16:21; Gl 6:11; 2Th 3:17; Phm 19).⁷

References

1. “Wilma Rudolph,” Olympics.com, accessed February 11, 2025, <https://www.olympics.com/en/athletes/wilma-rudolph>; Arlisha R. Norwood, “Wilma Rudolph,” National Women’s History Museum, 2017, <https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/wilma-rudolph>.
2. Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Colossians,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1898.
3. Köstenberger, 1899.
4. Köstenberger, 1899.
5. Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Complete: Become the Whole Person God Intends You to Be* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2008), 172.
6. Blue Letter Bible, “Strong’s G4342 – proskartereō,” accessed February 11, 2025, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4342/csb/mgnt/0-1/>.
7. Köstenberger, 1899.