

Faithful Saints Colossians 4:2-18

This last chapter in Colossians includes Paul's final instructions and greetings to the church in Colossae, a church he had never visited, but knew well.

Brief review: We have considered Christ's Lordship (ch. 1); Christ's Liberty (ch. 2); Christ's Life (ch. 3); and today we finish with Christ's Laborers (ch. 4) [**Pray**]

Max Anderson tells the following: Janice Munson, 39, and her husband, Dan, were on a shopping trip in Littleton, Colorado, when they came up behind a silver minivan moving along at a very slow pace. The minivan swerved first onto the shoulder, and then into oncoming traffic. Janice glanced into the minivan and was startled to see that the driver appeared to be asleep.

Dan engaged his flashers and began waving his arm and blinking his headlights to warn approaching traffic. Janice knew she had to act. Without a word to her husband, she jumped from the car. Within seconds, she was running alongside the van. She grabbed the door handle, banged on the window and yelled, "You're going the wrong way!" The woman only stared back vacantly.

Janice swung the door open and vaulted inside the moving vehicle. She slammed the gearshift into park, bringing the van to an abrupt stop. Seconds later, a stream of cars coming from the opposite direction whizzed safely past the van and its occupants. Afterwards, police told Janice that the van driver was a diabetic suffering from insulin shock. She was taken to a nearby hospital, treated, and released."

Janice was a hero — "a very ordinary person" you might say, who did an extraordinary deed — she was a thirty-nine-year-old wife and mom who risked her life to save lives.

- Ordinary people really can make an extraordinary impact in the world.
- This is not only true in cases of heroic rescue stories like this one, but it is also true in the story of Christianity.
- The history of Christian ministry is largely the history of unsung heroes who have made a powerful gospel impact on the world.

- We read about such saints all through the NT.
- And we have a list of some here in Colossians 4.
- Today we get to think on such saints.
- And by God's grace, continue their legacy of faithfulness.
- **After all, we are here because of them!**
- Somehow the gospel got from the Middle East/Turkey to Raleigh today — and that happened as ordinary Christians lived out their faith.

At first glance, you can read right through these names without much thought.

- **I mean it kind of looks like Paul's facebook friends or twitter followers!**
- But there is gold here.

This passage not only highlights some unsung heroes, but it also shows us that the apostle Paul was not a one man show.

- He did not operate in isolation.
- It is remarkable how many individuals Paul mentions in his letters!
- He was a team player; a highly relational leader.
- He had what some have called “the genius of friendship.”
- We overlook this relational element too often when thinking about mission.
- Paul knew the gospel; he was bold; he was Spirit-led — and he had coworkers!
- He traveled with his friends; worked alongside of them; he sang in prisons with them; he prayed with them; got persecuted with them; reconciled with them... he was supported by them; encouraged by them.

We need such gospel friendships... for edification, wisdom, to get work done...

- Students, don't choose friendships based on image or popularity, but wisdom (Prov)

Teamwork is highlighted in verses 2-6 through the work of prayer and shared responsibility to witness, and in 7-18 by the list of faithful servants that Paul mentions.

It's all about **being faithful to do our part.**

You can see the theme of **faithfulness** can be seen in a number of ways.

- Paul opened, “to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae” (1:2) and now he closes with some final instructions and mentions of particular saints.
- **Faithful prayer** (4:2) – “steadfastly” in prayer; that is be faithful, consistent...
- **Faithful witness** (4:6).
 - Paul's witness (4:3-4)
 - The Colossians' witness (4:5-6)
 - We looked at this text last year, as we talked about reaching people in our networks. [Insert graphic]
 - **This is a great time to hit the subject of evangelism again, esp this time of year.**
- **Faithful service** (4:7-18). He mentions a number of faithful saints who exemplify a life of faithfulness.
 - “faithful minister” (Tychicus)
 - “faithful brother” (Onesimus)
 - He mentions what Epaphras is “always” doing (v. 12)
 - Archippus is exhorted to fulfill his ministry – to be faithful to the end (v. 17)
 - Paul's own example of faithfulness in verse 18.

So we might outline these final instructions and greetings in three parts.

Faithful saints are (1) faithful in prayer, (2) faithful in witness, and (3) faithful in service.

#1: Faithful in Prayer (4:2-4)

Verses 2-6 touch on the believer's prayer life, and public life.

It's about how we as *new creations* (3:1-17) take people to God in prayer, God to people in evangelism.

Verses 2-4 is first about believers' prayer life.

Context: The word on prayer is important because you might ask, How can I handle all the things that Paul is talking about!? (3:18-onward). Look at all this! And now I'm supposed to be a witness as well!? We handle it *through prayer*.

Tucked away in the middle of responsibilities in the home and work and to outsiders is a word about prayer.

A. Persistent Prayer

- “Continue steadfastly” – Be persistent in prayer.
- Jesus told us in Luke 18 to **pray and not give up**.
- The early church was devoted to prayer - Acts 1:14; 2:42; 6:4; Acts 12
- **We call upon our Sovereign God in all circumstances; the God who is able to do more than we can ask or imagine: who shuts lions' mouths, humiliates Pharaohs, breaks chains, and opens prison doors.**
- Rom 12:12.... “Pray at all times in the Spirit ... with all perseverance” (Eph 6:18)
- D. L. Moody visited Scotland in the 1800's and was speaking at a local grade school. He asked the question, “What is prayer?” To his surprise, hundreds of children's hands went up. He called on the student up front who said, “**Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, in the name of Christ, by the help of his Spirit, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.**” Westminster Catechism. (#98)
- Moody responded, “Be thankful, son, that you were born in Scotland.”
- I like that definition, and the first part is a needed word: “Offering up our desires to God...”
- Do you do that? Are you doing that? Not selfishly, but pouring out your heart like a Psalmist?
- **God loves to be asked!!! It is like incense (Rev 5:8)**
- We are not annoying him? He told us to “ask and keep on asking.”
- “Call upon me in the time of trouble and I will deliver you, and you will glorify me” (Ps 50:15)
- Prayerlessness comes from unbelief, it comes from thinking too much of ourselves...

B. Informed Prayer (4:2)

- “Being watchful” – Be alert. Stay awake. This recalls the Garden.
- “The believers are to ‘be alert’ about what issues for which their Christian brothers and sisters need prayer.” (Beale)
- Be aware of spiritual warfare; be aware of the mission.
- Don't pray with your head in the sand, but know what's going on.
- Your prayers should **be in tune with the times.**
- Practiced informed prayer, **know what's going on missionally.**

C. Thankful Prayer (4:2)

- “with thanksgiving” – Here is one final note on thanksgiving in Colossians! (3:17, 3:16, 15; 2:61:12; 1:3)
 - “Tis the season for thanksgiving” – it is always the season for thanksgiving for the Christian!
 - **The gospel should always lead us to thanksgiving. (1:12-13; 2:15)**
1. Thanksgiving is one of the primary ways you fight discontentment.
 2. It is one of the primary ways you live as though Christ really is enough.

3. It is one of the ways you keep your prayer life fresh

- **Moule: “Maintain your zest for prayer by thanksgiving.”**

D. Missional Prayer (4:3-4)

- Paul asks for the church to pray for him and those in his circle “us” (cf., 4:7-18; Eph 6:18-20)

Pray for “an open door for the word” (4:3)

- **Paul wants the word to enter the hearts and minds of individuals and communities.**
- Paul uses this expression an “open door” elsewhere when describing situations in which his witness was particularly effective; that is, God was at work:
 - After the first missionary journey, Paul gave a report to the church in Antioch: “And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.” (Acts 14:27)
 - “But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, ⁹for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.” (1 Cor 16:8b-9)
 - When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, ¹³my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. (2 Cor 2:12-13)
- **There are places where the doors are bolted shut, so to speak; they are countries that are bolted shut; there are hearts that are bolted shut – pray for an open door!**
- Pray for **gospel opportunities.**
- The Holiday Season may be one of those seasons!
- Pray for one another in our networks ... in the ministries of this church

Pray for “the mystery of Christ” to be proclaimed “clearly” (4:4)

- **That is, God’s plan for the salvation of the nations through the Messiah.**
- The message of the word focuses on **Christ** (Col 1:28-29), the hope of glory.

He asks for gospel **clarity** in preaching it.

- Why? Because clarity matters! Eternity hangs in the balance.
- **Phillip meets Ethiopian, Do you understand what you’re reading? ... How can I understand it unless someone explain it...?**
- **God was at work: What a softball! Not Leviticus, or Ezekiel; or Judges (some left handed man stabs a fat king!), but Isaiah 53! That’s encouraging...**
- **Ethiopian thought he was going home from his visit to Jerusalem... but meets a Jewish convert, and gets baptized in the desert!**
- **Two gifts: Scripture, and teachers to explain it.. to make it clear.**
 - Sometimes it’s questions
 - Sometimes the Bible is like a puzzle; they can’t put it together
 - Some need a framework by which to understand the gospel.
- There’s also **an ethical responsibility** - “this is how I ought to speak.”

Pray for clarity.

- **If Paul needed prayer for clarity, how much more do we!**
- In Eph 6:18-20, he requested pray for **boldness.**
- We need both: **clarity and boldness.**
- **People may reject the gospel, but let’s make sure they know what they’re rejecting.**

Do you have a place and a plan for praying like this? Prayer walk?
Praying in co-centric circles? Morning, noon, evening?
Start the morning on your knees and in the Bible before on your phone?

#2: Faithful in Witness (4:5-6)

Paul speaks of “**outsiders.**”

Do you know any **outsiders**? There are a number of them in RDU:

- Spiritual but not Religious?
- Nones?
- Agnostic?
- Another religion?

We must not become a holy huddle, always speaking the language of Zion to insiders, but must maintain a concern for outsiders.

- We must remember that we were once them.
- And we must exercise wisdom.

A. Wisdom Toward Outsiders

- **You might think of this as “evangelistic skills” or “evangelistic sensibilities.”**
- Walking in wisdom means walking like Jesus toward outsiders.
- No one was more effective than him!

Consider the Thessalonian pattern:

1 **Thess 4:11-12**

... aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before *outsiders* and be dependent on no one.

So here, wisdom toward outsiders involves **working hard and not meddling.**

- **To be a good witness at work, you need to first be a good employee.**
- Walking in wisdom means **not bringing reproach on the name of Christ by the way you live.**
- Don't be a **stumbling block, but be an effective witness** by how you live.

B. The Best Use of Your Time

- It's a phrase taken from the marketplace.
- The verb literally means “buying up” or “buying out”
- “**snap up every opportunity**” like it's a bargain (ex: Holiday Shopping).
- **The Lord gives us certain golden opportunities to bear witness. Take advantage of them!**
- Perhaps you will have opportunity to **invite someone to dinner, to bless them in a tangible way; to give a book to them. Be ready.**

Be creative in creating opportunities with outsiders, exercise wisdom, and take advantage of opportunities.

Easy Ways to be Missional

1. Eat with Outsiders.
2. Be a Regular.
3. Hobby with Non-Christians.
4. Talk to Your Co-workers.
5. Volunteer with Non-Profits.
6. Participate in City Events.
7. Walk Your Neighborhood.
8. Start a Group/Event with your Neighbors.

C. How to Talk: Graciously, Winsomely, and Appropriately (4:6)

So when you get in dialogues, what do you say? How do you talk?

1. Graciously

- We must avoid arrogance and harshness
- We must speak about the gospel of grace with grace.
- You don't want to win arguments, but lose people because of your attitude.

2. Winsomely

“seasoned with salt” – In contemporary idiom, to be “salty language” is nasty, talk, replete with profanities. That’s obviously not the point! [Lot’s wife was very salty!]

Paul’s talking about being flavorful, enjoyable, attractive, winsome.

- He’s not using it in the preservative sense.
- Virtually every scholar believes this, and it is also how Chrysostom, Socrates, Plutarch, Cicero, and others used it.

David Garland:

‘Seasoned with salt’ was used to refer to witty, amusing, clever, humorous speech. Their saltiness will prevent them from being ignored as irrelevant bores.... Godliness is not to be equated with stodginess. Flat formulas or lifeless platitudes do not capture the gospel’s excitement. It must be made palatable with a savory combination of charm and wit.

John Piper:

I take this to mean that what we say about Christ and about the Christian life should be made as appetizing as possible. When food is not salted, its taste is *bland*. People don't want to eat it. It's unappetizing. Our speech is not supposed to be like that. This is one of the most refreshing things I have ever heard anyone say about personal evangelism.

- Make your witness interesting, lively, and engaging.
- Avoid boring, tedious, monotonous conversation.
- Obviously you can overboard; the point is *not to entertain*.
- It’s simply that believers and their life and conversation should be interesting and engaging.

Use your personality. While some parts of our personality need to be sanctified, generally speaking we should share the good news with our personality!

- **You can be introverted and still interesting!**
- **If you're witty, use your wit**
- **If you're the extroverted social butterfly, let your excitement shine**
- **If you practice hospitality well, let your kindness impact them.**
- **Every person is interesting because every person is unique!**

Don't turn into an evangelism robot. But be yourself – but don't preach yourself.

Don't retreat from people, but engage them!

James Dunn:

Here ... was a church not on the defensive against powerful forces organized against it, but expected to hold its own in the social setting of marketplace, baths, and meal table and to win attention by the attractiveness of its life and speech."

How can you make your conversation with unbelievers attractive and appealing?

- **You must first enjoy the gospel yourself!**
 - That's why it's essential to preach the gospel to yourself everyday.
- **You need to love people, and enjoy being present with them.**
- **You need to engage them with personality, joy, and even wit. Relax and lighten up.**
- **Ask sincere questions about their life – don't treat them as a project.**
 - **Ask questions – genuinely, not as a gimmick. Not as a salesman, working through your protocols.**
 - **Get to know their passions.**
 - **Ask a thought-provoking questions.**
 - Dealing with a Doctor, "How do you give hope to patients?"
 - Dealing with someone who loves art, "How do you think we come to determine what is beautiful?" "I don't know, how do you think?"

[Graciously, winsomely, and ...]

3. Appropriately

"each person" – Notice Paul recognizes that **each person is different.**

- **One canned presentation doesn't address each person's questions.**
- It's okay to have a presentation memorized, but **we need to do better than that.**
- Each person needs individual attention.
- This idea is conveyed in **1 Peter 3:15**: "be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for the reason for the hope that is in you"

How to Answer Well:

- **Spend time with questioners. Talk more to your neighbors.**
 - **The Reason for God and Questioning Christianity both came out of conversations with people.**
- **Be a good listener.**
 - **Evangelism is a lot about listening, curiosity and being interested in the person.**

- **It can feel more like “counseling than debating.”**
- **By listening, you will learn how to apply the gospel to them.**
- **Jesus never used one canned presentation; he knew people and addressed them.**
- **Know your faith.** Learn how to answer some of the basic questions that often arise.
- **Use natural language.**
- **Utilize testimony.**
- **Remember evangelism can be a community project.**
- **Rely on the Spirit.** Talk prayerfully.
- **Have an unshakable confidence in the gospel.** God saves all kinds of people through the preaching of the gospel.

#3: Faithful in Service (4:7-18)

“Say hello to my little friends”

There is a deep longing in us for friendships, we are made in the imago dei....

Some of the most popular shows of all time are built around this theme:

- 80’s - **Cheers** -- “Sometimes you wanna go...”
- 90’s – **Friends** “I’ll be there for you...”
 - not to mention **Seinfeld**
 - **Saved by the Bell** (High School friendships)
- 2000’s – **Lost** (those who became friends after a crash, although some were dead!)
- 2010’s - Stranger Things?
- Lord of the Rings... Sam and Frodo

Here we read of Gospel Friends, **faithful servants in Christ’s church, which shows us some ways we may serve the Lord.**

This text also shows us **the power of the gospel**: how these relationships are established.

- **Onesimus, a runaway slave had been converted;**
- **Jewish believers were in the same room with Gentile believers, as the gospel broke through various barriers.**
- **Sin has fractured relationships, but Christ’s salvation involves the creation of a new family: “We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brothers.”**
- **The gospel creates wonderful friendships.**

It also shows that Paul’s work was a team effort.

A. Tychicus and Onesimus: The Importance of Encouragement and the Transforming Power of the Gospel (4:7-8).

Tychicus

- **His task was to share the news and about Paul and bring **encouragement** to the Colossians. (cf. 2:2).**
- **Tolkien of Lewis: “The unpayable debt that I owe him was not ‘influence’ as it is ordinarily understood, but sheer *encouragement*. He was for long my only audience.**

Only from him did I ever get the idea that my ‘stuff’ could be more than a private hobby. But for his interest and unceasing eagerness for more I should never have brought The Lord of the Rings to a conclusion.

- Tychicus is to encourage the Colossians.
- Paul can’t go, so he deploys others to do this.
- We need people to tell us, “Don’t grow weary in well doing.”
- He was so close to Paul, Paul could say, “He’ll tell you all about me.”
 - He is mentioned in **Eph 6:21-22; and 2 Tim 4:12 and Titus 3:12.**
 - He was the loyal bearer of the letter to the Colossians and Ephesians (see Eph. 6:21-22; Col. 4:7-8)...
- Further, he will help resolve the issue with Onesimus.
- Why would the report of Paul’s imprisonment *encourage* the Colossians?
 - His example will encourage them.
 - His concern for them would encourage them
 - God’s purposes will encourage them: the gospel will spread through suffering.
 - This goes back to Col 1:24. This was part of God’s plan for the spread of the gospel.
 - What God is doing around the world will encourage the church to be faithful in witness – for God is on the move!
 - **Sam - baptized 11 people**

Onesimus

- He is likely the same Onesimus that was a runaway slave who got converted!
- Philemon was a wealthy Christian who had several bond-servants, and lived in Colossae
- At some point, Onesimus, one of Philemon’s servants, fled to Rome.
- He may have stolen from Philemon
- Onesimus was in the middle of a major city, but in the amazing providence of God, he came to faith in Christ.
- Somehow this runaway slave came into contact with the apostle Paul and became a Christian.
- He then helped Paul, who was limited by his imprisonment.
- Paul would write a letter to Philemon, sharing the testimony of Onesimus, and urged him to receive him back not merely as a “beloved brother” (v. 16).
- Notice that wonderful little phrase, **“who is one of you.”**
- “Rejoice, for the slave is our brother.”
- Paul values the sharing of news with the saints.

Application: One of the greatest ministries you may have in this life is encouraging God’s people.

B. Jewish Brothers: Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus: The Importance of Comfort, Commitment and the Power of Jesus’ Restoring Grace (4:10-11)

- Jewish believers – there weren’t many, as Acts shows us.

Aristarchus: Committed

- It seems that he was not free to travel, but was in prison with Paul.
- Aristarchus (if this was the same one) was a native of Thessalonica, and had been arrested during the riot in Ephesus (Acts 19:29).
- He accompanied Paul to Rome (20:4); and later was with him on the wild journey to Rome (Acts 27:2)
- He had been through many dangers, toils, and snares with Paul!
- You love those friends!
- He was committed to the mission.

Mark: A Restored Servant (4:10)

- He wrote the gospel that bears his name
- We know a good bit about him (Acts 12:12, 25; 13:13; 15:37-39; 1 Pet 5:13)
- His mother hosted the meetings of Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12)
- On the second missionary journey, Paul wanted to revisit some cities where people believe in Christ, and Barnabas [his older cousin] wanted to take Mark along (Acts 15:36-37) but Paul didn't because Mark had earlier deserted them in Pamphylia (15:38), returning to Jerusalem (13:13).
- In light of the dispute, Barnabas took him; and Paul went with Silas.
- But look now: **There had been reconciliation and healing in the relationship.**
- **2 Tim 4:11:** Pick up Mark and bring him with you for he is very useful to me."
- **1 Pet 5:13:** Mark is a coworker with Peter at the church in Rome.
 - Mark's gospel is essentially Peter's preaching/reports written by Mark.

This is a wonderful biographical word of hope for failures.

- **Failure is not final because of the restoring grace of Jesus.**
- Do you feel like a disappointment due to some failure: morally, relationally, or a ministerial failure, or a wisdom failure?
- It does not have to define you!
- It doesn't mean that Christ is finished with you, and has written you off!
- Just ask Mark! **He wrote a book of the Bible! That's quite a recovery!**
- Take a word from Joel: "Jesus restores the years that the locust have eaten."

Justus: Faithful Kingdom Worker (4:11)

- We know nothing about this guy, other than he is labeled as a faithful worker in the kingdom of God as well.
- That is enough to be known for!

"these have been a comfort to me."

- Don't underestimate the importance of friends who comfort and encourage.
- **2 Corinthians 7:5b-6.** "We were afflicted on every turn - fighting without, fear within. But God, who comforts the downtrodden, comforted us by the coming of Titus."

C. Epaphras: The Importance of Intercessory Prayer (4:12-13)

- The Church planter

- He pours out his soul in prayer (4:12)
- Hard worker (13) – perhaps started the neighboring churches also
- “**Wrestling in prayer**” – (agonizing) that is exhausting!
- Have you been exhausted in prayer lately?
- Notice the goal of his ministry: maturity. (4:12c; see 1:9-14; 2:2).
- Remember they had so many weird cults in Colossae.
- So the pastor’s goal? That the people would be firm in the faith, in the sufficiency of Jesus.
- He taught to this end, and prayed to this end.
- You don’t have to be a pastor to pour out your heart in intercession.

D. Luke and Demas: The Importance of Loyalty (4:14)

Luke traveled with Paul many times. He was a physician, a writer, a friend. (He was apparently a Gentile, based on the context, v. 11).

- He remained devoted to Christ, and Paul.
- “Only Luke is with me” (2 Tim 4:11) - **hey!**
- “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (17:17).

But **Demas** apparently deserted Paul later (2 Tim 4:10). There was deep sadness. A reality in the church.

- It seems that the cost of discipleship was too great for him.
- The world’s attractions were more important to him.
- 2 Timothy 4:10: For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.
- He had the teaching of Paul, the companionship of Paul but deserted him.
- His life serves as a warning... watch your loves!

E. Nympha: The Importance of Hospitality (4:15)

- She is one of numerous women mentioned in the NT who made a significant contribution to the spread of the gospel. (see Romans 16)
- She, like Lydia, was apparently a person of means, and hosted a church in her house.
- Churches did not have buildings in the first century, and so they met in the home, the courtyard, or on the roof of someone’s large house (see Acts 12:12; 16:40; Rom 16:3-5, 23; 1 Cor 16:19; Philemon 2) [Garland]

4:16: Notice the networking of churches also.

- Christians did not exist in isolation and churches did not exist in isolation.

F. Archippus: The Importance of Perseverance (4:17)

- We aren’t told what his ministry was, but he apparently had some responsibility in the church in Colossae.
- He may have been a pastor, or overseeing the congregation in the absence of Epaphras.
- He exhorts him to fulfill his ministry, and Paul may have also intended for this exhortation to show Paul’s support of him.

- Can you imagine reading this out loud and having Archippus in the audience!

Paul: Faithful Apostle (4:18)

- There were phony letters (See 2 Thess **3:17**); Paul would authenticate them with his signature.
- He adds “remember his chains.”
- It is a note of encouragement to all who suffer for the faith. It is not to pity Paul.
- But it is a way of showing support to the faithful.
- He is saying, “Don’t be ashamed to suffer for the truth.”

4:18: Paul longs for the saints to experience God’s grace.

Grace is the last word.

- Paul leaves them under Jesus’ power.
- Grace is not just saving grace.
- Grace is also sustaining grace.

⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor 12:9)

Christ grace is enough.

Christ is enough...

- He is the friend your heart has always wanted;
- He laid down his life for his friends....
- the friend of sinners is with us always, even to the end of the age.
- In is through him, because of him, and for him, that we give ourselves to this mission together.
- Until we see him face to face.