

Our Vision for Church Multiplication

“God, Open a Door for the Word Next Door”

Colossians 4:2-6

Mark Vroegop

² Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. ³ At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— ⁴ that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. ⁵ Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person (Colossians 4:2–6).

The month of November is a very important time of year for us as a church. On November 23 we will host our annual congregational meeting where our members will vote to affirm Elders, Deacons, our 2015 annual budget, and our first official step toward starting a new campus in the Fishers area. Over the last number of months our staff and Elders have worked really hard to put together the information that we are going to share with you beginning today. We do so because we believe that church is something that we do together – even in a large church.

Our church governance model is a combination of Elder leadership and congregational approval. This means that our Elders are given the privilege to lead our church, but there is real accountability to the congregation through your vote at the congregational meeting. In order for this governance model to work, Elders need to lead and members need to attend and vote during our congregational meeting.

Therefore, please pick up a congregational meeting packet on your way out of our service today, and please make November 23 a priority in your schedule. If you are not a member, we’d still love for you to come and listen, and we hope that what you see happen that night will serve to motivate you to consider becoming a member of this church family.

When you pick up your congregational packet and when you come to the congregational meeting, you will see a motion to approve the start of a campus incubator leading to full launch of a new campus sometime in 2015. For over a year we have been praying, studying, researching, and preparing for this launch, and today I want to share our vision for multiplication. And I want to ask you to pray this prayer from Colossians 4: **“God, please open a door for the Word next door.”**

How We Got Here

By God’s grace we completed this sanctuary, the doubling of the church’s facility, and the complete renovation of the rest of the facility in 2012. God helped us complete a \$20 million project on time and within budget and with \$4.9 million in debt. We immediately set our sights on paying off that debt as fast as possible so that we could be free to pursue the future opportunities that God would

send our way. Thanks to your generosity in giving more than we budgeted and to people who continued to give after the completion of this facility, I'm pleased to tell you that together we have paid off over \$4 million of our debt in two years! And we are praying that sometime in 2015 (maybe 2014!) we could celebrate the complete pay-off of the Mission Expansion Project debt.

Soon after we moved into this new facility, our Elders and Pastors began an earnest discussion about how to be sure we continue to be a church on mission. We wanted to be sure that we did not allow the church to become more like a cruise ship than a battleship. We affirmed the following statement in 2012, and I presented it to the church in January 2013:

We will fight against the natural, gravitational pull of a large church, which despite all its blessings, can often lead to under-developed life-on-life discipleship and stagnating spiritual maturity. Therefore, we will invite our people to a refocused vision toward "presenting everyone mature in Christ" (Col. 1:28) at every level of ministry such that spiritual depth, personal transformation, and multiplication are visible aspects of our future culture.

After an intense season of facility growth, we wanted to renew our focus on discipleship, evangelism, and multiplication, especially in light of the fact that our church survey revealed that 60% of us did not know our neighbors well enough to have a spiritual conversation with them. What's more, we were stunned to learn that 60% of people in the Indy metro area are unchurched, and that Indianapolis is near the bottom of list when it come to large cities with new church plants.

We began talking about College Park Next. Our Elders and Pastors spent the last year and a half researching a strategy to accomplish two goals: 1) to mobilize our people to live on mission and 2) to multiply our church as a means of reaching our city. As we plotted on a map where each family from College Park lives, we were surprised with the number of people who lived so far away from the church and how it really affected their ability to invite someone to come with them to church or to be involved in the ministry. In other words, the further away you live, the harder it is connect to our mission of igniting a passion to follow Jesus.

Therefore, we developed a strategy to start College Park campuses with the same values, theology, leadership, teaching, and worship as what happens at 96th and Towne in closer proximity to where our people live. After meeting with groups of people from three areas of the city, we believe that the first place for us to start a campus is Fishers. And we believe that doing so will not only help one particular area of our city, but it will also challenge all of us to live more on mission.

From the beginning, however, we didn't like the name College Park Next. It sounded too much about us. After hearing a staff member ask prayer for his neighbors next door and seeing the powerful call in Colossians 4, we want to add the word "door" to our mission and invite all of us to think about our Next Door Mission.

In order to help you understand our vision more clearly, our team has put together a video that captures the heart and the strategy behind what College Park Next Door is all about.

The External Mission of Colossians 4

The book of Colossians is about the centrality of Christ. Or, if you were here in 2008 for my first series at College Park, the book of Colossians is about how Christ is the core of everything. Jesus is the central reality in history, theology, and in the lives of those who call him Lord. Our text today is the conclusion of what Paul said in Colossians 3:1: “If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above...”

This applies to a Christian’s personal spiritual growth (3:2-11), relationships within the community of faith (3:12-4:1), and finally to those who are “outside” the community of faith. Colossians 4:2-6 is an external-minded text, and it is helpful for us to consider as we think about what is before our church.

How to Pray

The first thing to notice here is the priority of prayer. This is how Colossians begins, as Paul expresses gratitude to God for them (1:3) and prays that they would be “*filled with the knowledge of his will... walk in a manner worthy of the Lord... bearing fruit in every good work...*” (1:9-12). Prayer is central to the mission of the church and critical for an external focus.

There are things to note here about how they are to pray:

1. Consistent – They are to “continue steadfastly in prayer.” Other translations render this as “devote yourselves to prayer.” ESV uses two words (continue steadfastly) instead of one, and the Greek word means to persist in something obstinately. The idea here is that there fundamental belief in the importance of prayer.

Too often followers of Jesus or entire churches treat prayer as if it were optional, something nice to have but not essential. It happens so easily especially when prosperity, size, or success cause people and churches to become very self-sufficient. One of the reasons we have a monthly Fresh Encounter Prayer Service, Elder prayer in our services, and even why we prayed today is because of what happens when we fail to pray.

One of the reasons why I have pushed for us to think about our external mission on a local level is because I know that it will create stress, challenges, and desperation. We are going to pray more in the next two years because we will not be able to figure everything out. And that is really good for our steadfastness in prayer.

2. Watchful – The word means more than what you might think. It means mental alertness, to be awake or to be alive. Alive to or awake to what? I found this explanation in a commentary insightful: “The Colossians’ prayers were to be in tune with the times. . . this meant that they were to know the circumstances of life, particularly those which affected the spread of the gospel.

Informed prayer is likely to be more purposeful, personal, and powerful.¹ So the meaning is not just that they were to stay awake when praying. Watchfulness means that you look around you at what is happening in the world and culture, at the needs in your neighborhood, or at the needs of people near you. It means that you do not allow the self-focused merry-go-round to drown out the needs of people and the world around you. To be watchful means that we have “woken-up” to why we are in the world, why we live where we live, why we do what we do, and how it all relates to God’s kingdom.

3. Grateful – Paul adds another aspect of their praying that is more important and impactful than what we often think. The concept of gratitude is found frequently in the book of Colossians (see Col. 1:3, 1:12, 3:15, 3:16), and it is a central characteristic of what it means to live as a Christian in the world – *“¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him”* (Colossians 3:17). Christians have been “graced” by God in that they have been forgiven through the death of Jesus, and they can rest assured that everything in life is part of God’s plan for their life.

As we think about the opportunity to reach our neighbors, we need to think about the issue of gratitude. A self-focused, bitter, ungrateful Christian is an oxymoron. This kind of sour attitude surfaces in more than just prayer, and when it does it serves as a barrier to people coming to faith in Christ. Why would they want what a bitter, selfish and ungrateful person has?

What’s more, grateful people are more inclined to talk about the beauty of the gospel. When your heart is full of gratitude, conversations tend to become opportunities to share your joy. When a friend or a spouse does something special for you – something totally undeserved – aren’t you inclined to talk about it? For some of you, the problem with evangelism is your lack of joy. You will easily talk about where you found gas for under \$3.00, the cool deal you got on Groupon, the crazy cat video on Facebook, and the value of whole grains. But it is a struggle to talk about the gospel, and part of the reason is that we are just not that excited about it. Gratitude is so unusual in our culture and yet it is so central to the gospel.

Consistent, watchful, grateful prayer is where we have to start as we think about our external mission. But there’s more.

What to Pray

Paul also identifies some very specific things for which the Colossians are to pray, and they relate to his personal ministry. What we find here is so helpful because it gives us a window into the heart of the Apostle Paul and a model for us to emulate.

¹ Melick, Richard R. *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*. Vol. 32. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991. Print. The New American Commentary.

1) Open Doors

Paul specifically asks that the church would pray for open doors for the word. This is not an unusual thing for Paul to talk about or for him to live out. Paul saw his life through this lens of walking through doors that God was opening. Paul reported back to the church at Antioch about how God had “opened a door of faith to the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27), and he wrote to the church at Corinth about a “wide door for effective work as opened for me” (1 Cor. 16:9).

Additionally, Paul lived practically in this “open door” mindset, using situations in life as divine opportunities. While visiting Athens, he engages Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in a discussion about worshipping an unknown God (Acts 17:16-34). He used a riot in Jerusalem to share the story of his conversion (Acts 21:37-22:21). After being arrested, he shared the gospel with political leaders (Acts 24), and he even used a shipwreck to talk about his faith in God (Acts 27:21-25). Paul lived his life on a gospel mission, and he was always looking for open doors.

If you look at the end of verse three, you will notice that Paul talks about open doors even while he is in prison. This is the remarkable and consistent thing about Paul; he always looks beyond his circumstances to what God may be doing. A great example of this is Philippians 1:12-18. Notice how the value of the gospel trumped everything for Paul:

¹² I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴ And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. ¹⁵ Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. ¹⁶ The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. ¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice. (Philippians 1:12–18)

The question that we need to wrestle with today is whether or not that is the lens through which we see life. One of the main reasons that we are pursuing this Next Door Mission is because it is so easy to fall into the trap of not thinking or praying or using the open doors that God lays before us. Our American culture, while a great blessing, can be deadly to our gospel witness as we are caught on the merry-go-round of prosperity, achievement, success and pleasure. It is so easy to forget why we are in our neighborhoods, in our places of employment, on the recreation soccer team, or in the school system. We need to see our lives through this lens of providential open doors. We need to pray for open doors.

2) Clear Words

The other thing for which Paul requests prayer is the ability to make the mystery of the gospel clear. Paul knew that open doors were walked through by making known the hidden and misunderstood message of the gospel. There is also a sense here that Paul is concerned that he would know how to make it clear in the different situations and people that he might encounter. If

you follow his ministry, you will see how Paul never adjusts the message of the gospel, but he does adjust the way in which he makes it clear.

Isn't that we need as well? Every person we encounter, every situation that we find ourselves in, and every opportunity is unique. What we need from the Lord is the ability to know how to make the gospel clear to different people. We have to start with building relationships with people and really caring for them, and after God opens the door we have to open our mouths, praying that the miracle of gospel clarity would happen.

Praying for open doors and for clear words is engaging yourself in God's mission. It is one of the most risky and yet rewarding things that you can do in walk with Christ. And I want to challenge you to start praying for God to give you open doors and for clarity in the words that you speak. I know that we are talking about stepping out in faith, but there are few things more exciting than knowing that God is at work around you and through you. Some of you have never experienced that. For others, it has been a while since you have experienced the joy of seeing God really work, and I covet that for you.

How to Live

The final thing Paul says here is a charge to the Colossian believers about how they are to live. After exhorting them to pray and asking for them to pray for him, he instructs them about how they should live. What should characterize their lives?

1) Wisely

Paul encourages the Colossians about their own opportunities by talking about walking in wisdom toward outsiders. It is very interesting to me that Paul uses this term of "outsiders." This is a really good reminder that Christian living is not just for the glory of Christ, it is for the reaching of those who are not inside the church. We need this reminder because it is too easy to forget who is not here, and we can become fixated on focusing more and more on ministry for and to ourselves.

Wisdom is a great word to use because it means applying biblical truth to life, and that is needed in the world. We need people not to leave the world and its culture but to enter it, be wise in it, and reach it. Our church needs you to gather regularly and then to be deployed in the various parts of our culture in which you operate and live.

2) Strategically

The next phrase in verse five is really important – "making the best use of the time." This sounds very similar to what Paul says in Ephesians 5:15-16 where Paul calls believers to walk in wisdom, to make the best use of the time because "the days are evil." In other words, Paul wants to remind us in Colossians and Ephesians that the clock is ticking and that we ought not waste our careers, where we live, our connections through our kids, the neighborhood block party, the dance class, or anything in which we are engaged. We need to live strategically.

3) Graciously

It is amazing to me how practical verse six is as Paul encourages the believers to be known by speech that is graciously seasoned. What does this mean? The idea is that we live in a very calloused and negative world, and if the gospel affects how you talk to people, they will notice. What's more, it will be apparent that there is something charmingly different about you. Listen, the world doesn't need any more grumpy, negative, and unkind people. So is there anything consistently different about how you talk to and treat other people? Paul would tell you that graciousness just fits with the gospel.

4) Personally

Finally, Paul puts a strong emphasis on the personal nature of our mission. He says, "so that you may know how to answer each person." Notice that the focal point comes down to one-on-one interactions. The gospel was meant to be spread and applied in individual conversations and life-on-life situations. There is something wonderful and helpful about a large gathering on the Lord's Day, and I am thrilled when you invite someone who is exploring Christianity to come with you. But the best opportunities for gospel witness are personal, one-on-one conversations. In other words, our best witness and your neighbor's best hope is you.

Do you see this vision in this text? Do you see how it fits with the heart of the Great Commission? And do you see the beauty of praying for open doors and clear words?

Our church needs you. Our staff and Elders cannot reach the people in your neighborhood like you can. God has placed you where you are for a reason. He has given you the challenges that you are in for a reason. Don't waste your career, your home, your athletic events, your small group, your visit to the gym, or your retirement.

Our Next Door Mission

Today my aim has been to lay before you our vision and why we should not only reach the unreached and the underserved but also the unchurched in our city. My aim to help us keep our focus on those who are not here and on the individual mission to reach our neighbors with the gospel.

Our strategy is to target key areas of our city where our people live and to put College Park campuses in closer proximity to where our people live. This way, they will be more inclined to engage in our mission of igniting a passion to follow Jesus, and they will be more inclined to reach their neighbors. The first place we intend to go is Fishers, and we plan to start an incubator group that begins to meet, with the hope of an official and public launch of a new campus sometime in the fall of 2015.

But we are also hoping and praying that all of this talk about going next door through a campus in Fishers will serve to motivate all of us to pursue our Next Door Mission. The need is great all around our city, and we need to think and pray about what God is calling us to do.

In light of all of this, here are my challenges to you:

1. If you are not a part of College Park Church, we need you to be a part of this church family. Some of you need to take the step of membership, others need to start contributing financially, others need to find an area of ministry in which to serve, and if you are a member, you need to come to the congregational meeting². I just want you to take one step, and I want you to think about your role. What is God calling you to do?
2. If you live in the Fishers area, I'd like for you to start praying about being an early adopter of our new campus and our Next Door Mission. There are some of you who for very good reasons will still come to 96th/Towne (our Indy Campus), but I'm praying for about 200 people who will enter into this exciting new journey. It will be an adventure. It will change our church. And you could be a part of this new moment in our church's life.
3. If you are giving regularly to the church, thank you! Please continue to do so. I am dreaming about paying off our debt as fast as possible so that we can use our mortgage payment for our Next Door Mission. Paying off our debt frees up almost \$500,000 per year that we could use to reach more people by starting new campuses.
4. Finally, I want to make this very personal. I want you to think and pray with me about the door around you and the names of the people behind them. Inside your bulletin is a yellow sticky note, and I'd like you to write down the first name of a person who is "next door," and as we close, I'd like you to pray for an open door.

Several years ago I visited a church and above its door as you left the building was a sign that read, "You are now entering the mission field." As you leave today, I'd like you to take your sticky note and put it on our sanctuary doors, and as you, do pray that God would open a door in your mission field.

I want you to pray with me: "God, open a door for the Word next door."

© College Park Church

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce this material in any format provided that you do not alter the content in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Mark Vroegop. © College Park Church - Indianapolis, Indiana. www.yourchurch.com

² Learn more about membership at College Park Church at yourchurch.com/membership.