

The Core: Living with Jesus at the Center

“Jesus centered living is other focused living “

Colossians 4:2-6

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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. (Col 4:2-6)

As we have studied Colossians, we have been acutely aware that the theme revolves around Jesus—he is the core, he is the center, he is preeminent, it is all about him. Paul has just finished a section on Christ-centered home and work life. The passage for this morning moves in a slightly different direction. The scope of this text is outside of ourselves and into the world. Paul sounds like Jesus who instructed his disciples to “lift up your eyes to the fields” and we are admonished that Jesus Centered living is other focused living. We live in a world where our Christian structures tend to be focused on ourselves. Our programs generally center around ourselves even when they are intended to help us worship. I remember, when my kids were very little, that I came home and found that someone had written in a colored marker all over the wall. I was quite certain that it was not a criminal, but one of the 3 kids. My youngest was one and not a probable suspect. My middle kid is a precocious boy who would be the logical suspect. Upon careful investigation, however, I determined that the 5 year old (the oldest) was the culprit, because she had unwisely signed the masterpiece and she was the only one of the 3 who could write. We tend to make things center around ourselves—even in our sin.

In this passage of Colossians 4:2-6 Paul describes 2 actions that demonstrate other focused living.

I. First action we see is the action of reaching UP in prayer—4:2-4

In verse 2, the first of 3 imperatives appears. Paul commands the readers to “continue **steadfastly** in prayer”. The nuance of steadfast and continue suggest perseverance and devotion. Prayer takes work and commitment. Paul does not offer it as an option, but as a necessary reality for a person following Jesus.

He then follows that imperative up with some amplification of that with 2 crucial words. We must be steadfast in prayer with watchfulness and thanksgiving. These 2 concepts are crucial to effective prayer. One must start with a **watchful** heart. This may be a reference to the return of the Lord—pray with an eye to the sky for Christ’s return. More likely is the idea of looking forward to how God is going to work in this world and how he is currently working. It is the same verbiage used by Jesus in Gethsemane when he asked his disciples to watch and pray. Watch and see what God is doing and what he will do. It reminds me of the birth of our kids. There was eager watchfulness for that advent and it was great to witness the event. So it is in prayer—pray watchful and see God work.

The second key word is **thanksgiving**. When we pray we not only watch to see God work, but we recall his blessings of the past. We are near to the Thanksgiving holiday which is so Christian in concept. My family take this time to reflect in joy on God’s goodness on the last year and thank him. If Christ is the focus we must all be thankful and should make that a major part of prayer.

Paul then moves into a specific use of prayer that shows that the one praying has his or her eyes on Jesus and is focused on others. Paul in vs. 3 commands them (second imperative in this text) to pray for him and particularly that God would **open a door** for the word. What a non-selfish prayer. One of the great challenges of prayer is that we wonder why we should pray if God is sovereign and will do what he wants. Paul deals with that notion beautifully as he calls us to get our eyes off of ourselves and petition the only one who can open doors (they will remain shut unless he opens them). God is the great door opener and does not need our help to open the door—it is his job—BUT—he opens doors in response to the prayers of saints. Paul knows that God works through prayer. Make no mistake, we must be praying for God to open doors. He alone can do it, and we must pray for it to happen.

Sound a bit contradictory? Paul accepts it as good Christian thinking and action. God is sovereign and I am responsible.

Paul's adds to the prayer by asking for prayer that as God answers and opens doors, Paul would be a faithful witness to the mystery of Christ (that he has offered salvation indiscriminately to all who believe) and that Paul would be clear in his telling of Jesus. What a great request. This morning let me make the gospel clear (as Paul does). In Romans 3:23 we learn that sin is the universal and fatal flaw of all humanity. The clear gospel is that Jesus died to conquer evil and to pay for our sins (Romans 5:8). Faith is necessary for one to come to Jesus that is, one must believe and trust in Jesus as the only way to the Father and the only one who can forgive sin (Rom. 10:9-10). It is clear and I hope you have all heard the message and responded. If you have not placed your faith in Jesus for salvation—please do so today. Paul wants his hears to pray that God will open doors so he can proclaim the clear gospel.

EXCURSION: Let me take a short excursion into the discussion of prayer. Most Christians struggle with prayer on many levels. Does it really matter, it is hard to do regularly, etc. Concerning the question of the effectiveness of prayer, let me mention a few points for your consideration

1. God can do what he wills and he will do what he wills
2. God could do everything by himself, but he uses means to accomplish his ends. The greatest means is prayer.
3. WE struggle with prayer partly because we do not always think it matters. We often think we need to dictate which doors to open and when and how to open them. We want to do his job.
4. Only God opens doors-----and he opens doors as we pray.
5. God opens doors for his people to bring him through those doors.

APPLICATION: Therefore the first action of other-focused, Jesus centered people is that they reach up and do OPEN DOOR PRAYING. How might that look? First, just get started praying. Get rid of the excuses and set apart time regularly to pray being watchful for God's future works and thankful for his past works. In that context be praying

for open doors. Let me suggest some practical areas to pray (which often leads to action on your part) here at College Park.

1. Today is the last day for Pick a partner. We have been encouraging each person at CPC to unite with a missionary partner and to commit for 1 year to support that ministry. It is not hard, but is a good way to do this text. In the back are cards where you can sign your name and drop the card in the basket. You will receive prayer reminders and can fulfill this passage and pray for the God who opens doors to do so
2. On that same table are vision trip passports. We have 13 trips scheduled for 2009 to many fields. You need to pray for open doors for each of those teams and perhaps you will pray better if you join one of the teams
3. I have a burden for Nicaragua. Please pray for open doors there. Here is a way to put feet to your prayers. We have about 40 kids that are not supported and need support to go to the Christian school. We already support about 260 kids
4. Our Christmas offering will go to Brookside, Indiana. Pray that God will open doors for the word there. You may also find that your prayers will be answered by God as he burdens you to help.
5. Finally, tonight is a prayer service. The saints get together and petition God in many areas, but mainly in the area of open doors. Come and obey Colossians 4:3

II. Second action—Put legs to your prayer—4:5-6

Paul now addresses his readers in brief and concise fashion that charges them to reach out to others and we can safely assume that the main reason for outreach is to share the gospel. There are 3 very interesting things that are mentioned in this outreach endeavor. He does not tell them the message to proclaim but the way in which the message needs to be proclaimed. There are 3 sides to this methodology. First, another imperative appears as we are told to “conduct ourselves wisely”. This has the sense of being **sensitive**, and “street wise” in dealing with those outside the faith. We have seen illustrations where there has been insensitivity to cultural norms as we have ministered in Nicaragua. Sometimes we have been unwilling to take their gifts thinking that we are so much richer than they are while ignoring their need to demonstrate

gratitude as they are able. In verse 4 we are told to make the best use of time. That verse has been translated "redeeming the time". The idea is that we have limited time and we must be careful to use time prudently and wisely and go down rabbit trails.

The second side of this proclamation is that our speech should be **salty**. This is a metaphor that we can relate to on some level. We are to engage people with speech that is not overly salty and thereby abrasive, but not so limited that the salt is not tasted. I have heard people overdo the salt to a waiter or waitress who has messed up. There are harsh (though perhaps accurate) words that crush the employee. That is not good salt speech for the world to hear. I have also been so detached from opportunities of being salty that rather than redeeming an opportunity to be salt in my speech, I have let it slide and never spread some gospel salt to my neighbors.

The third side of a healthy witness is to be **speedy** in response. Paul says we need to know how to give an answer. We need to be ready to respond to the hope in us. Not everyone is Paul or a Doctor of theology, but as believers we need to be always ready to answer others of the hope in us. We can defer some complex questions of theology to others, but we need to be able to tell our own testimony and the basics of faith. Here at CPC we want all to be equipped to answer. We will be starting a 4 week class on the Basics of Christianity in January and run it monthly as long as there is interest. We are going to be doing some evangelism training in Feb. and have a great conference coming on Feb. 28 on the trinity. We have Bible studies and great preaching in many venues. God wants a Biblically literate church live out the reality of the Word and who are ready to tell that Word to the world.

SOOOOO---Paul can pack a lot into a small area. To be Christ centered is to be others centered. Please check your heart. We all need to be reaching up in prayer. Commit today to be a **DOOR OPEN** pray-er. Get a card and covenant to pray for God to open doors in the world, like Nicaragua, India and other places. Then commit to being more **SALTY** in your world. Spread salt in your neighborhood, city, state, country and watch God open doors all over. TO GOD ALONE BE THE GLORY!!