

COLOSSIANS

ALIVE IN CHRIST

(5) "Living Wisely by Making the Most of Every Opportunity" HIGHLIGHT: Colossians 4:2-18 NLT

H

Below are excerpts from the overall passage for use with the APPLICATION and RESPOND. It will be beneficial for the group to read the whole passage to understand the entire context.

Colossians 4 (NLT)

vv. 2-18

2 Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart. **3** Pray for us, too, that God will give us many opportunities to speak about his mysterious plan concerning Christ. That is why I am here in chains.

4 Pray that I will proclaim this message as clearly as I should.

5 Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. **6** Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.

7 Tychicus will give you a full report about how I am getting along. He is a beloved brother and faithful helper who serves with me in the Lord's work. **8** I have sent him to you for this very purpose—to let you know how we are doing and to encourage you. **9** I am also sending Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, one of your own people. He and Tychicus will tell you everything that's happening here.

10 Aristarchus, who is in prison with me, sends you his greetings, and so does Mark, Barnabas's cousin. As you were instructed before, make Mark welcome if he comes your way. **11** Jesus (the one we call Justus) also sends his greetings. These are the only Jewish believers among my co-workers; they are working with me here for the Kingdom of God. And what a comfort they have been!

12 Epaphras, a member of your own fellowship and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends you his greetings. He always prays earnestly for you, asking God to make you strong and perfect, fully confident that you are following the whole will of God. **13** I can assure you that he prays hard for you and also for the believers in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

14 Luke, the beloved doctor, sends his greetings, and so does Demas. **15** Please give my greetings to our brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church that meets in her house.

16 After you have read this letter, pass it on to the church at Laodicea so they can read it, too. And you should read the letter I wrote to them.

17 And say to Archippus, "Be sure to carry out the ministry the Lord gave you."

18 HERE IS MY GREETING IN MY OWN HANDWRITING—PAUL.

Remember my chains.

May God's grace be with you.

EXPLAIN

The purpose of this section is to deepen everyone's understanding of the Word.

In chapters 1—2 of Colossians Paul pleaded with his readers to embrace the supremacy of Christ (not listen to the false teachers who reduced Jesus to a phantom so far removed from God He was useless) and the fact He lived within them and brought them out of their deadness and into life. In chapter 3 he painted a picture of what that should look like in their everyday relations with other people. While he still taught in chapter 4, he peeled back the veneer and showed the Colossians his heart. Underneath his brilliant mind was a heart in love with Jesus. And that made all the difference in the world. While we may say, "Seize the day," Paul said, "Make the most of every opportunity" (4:5).

Colossians 4:2-18

vv.2-4 For Paul, **prayer** was more than a discipline that strengthened one's relationship with Jesus. It was the lifeblood that brought oxygen to every cell in his body and to every aspect of his ministry. Prayer must be laser-focused: **devoted ("steadfast" ESV)**—keeping the line of communication open with the One "through whom and for whom everything was created" (1:15-16). No room for laziness and half-hearted devotion; **an alert mind** keenly aware of the threatening dangers that come with being aligned with Jesus; **a thankful heart** that is fed by remembering what we were before Jesus (dead, in the dark, and enemies of God [1:13, 21]) and meditating on the experience of being blameless before God because of the work of Jesus on the cross (1:20). It was this redeeming work of Christ that caused Paul to seek prayers from the church, not for deliverance from prison or the physical and emotional trauma that comes with it (see 2 Timothy 4:9-18), but for **opportunities and clarity** to proclaim the gospel wherever God had chosen to "plant" him. Strength and opportunity to do the work—that was Paul's desire: bringing glory to God. What a difference it would make if we would cease praying for lives of ease, and begin praying for lives of effect (see Acts 4:29-31).

vv.5-6 During the pandemic we have become acutely aware of how critical hospital space is. A hospital can make the difference between life and death. It's where sick people go to get well. In these verses Paul reminds us that the church is a hospital for sinners. The church is not a museum for plaster saints. Nothing lives in a museum. Life is the mission of a hospital. So, **living wisely among those who are not believers** is our mandate. We have been where they are; we want them to have what we have. So **make the most of every opportunity**. For Paul, prison was his sphere of influence, and he asked the church to pray he would make the most of that opportunity. Whether it was the **way he acted toward outsiders (those who are not believers)**, or the **conversations** he had with the soldiers to whom he was chained. Question: is my life **gracious and attractive—seasoned with salt (NIV and ESV)**? Would people say I bring flavor to the lives of others (like salt on buttered corn)? Do my words promote life or death? This may be your only opportunity to "make the teaching about God our Savior attractive in every way" (Titus 2:10). Make the most of it.

vv.7-9 Paul was not only in love with Jesus and with all whom Jesus loved (wanting them to know the same deliverance from sin and condemnation he had experienced) but his heart overflowed with love towards those whose lives had crossed his path. These people were God's grace gifts to Paul—proving again His grace would be sufficient for Paul—whatever he would face. Some of these people, like **Tychicus and Onesimus**, are mostly unfamiliar to us but were dear to Paul. Onesimus was a run-away

slave of Philemon. But he doesn't call him a run-away, but a **faithful and beloved brother**. He had turned his life over to Christ. And in the Kingdom of God that puts us all on equal footing—redeemed and delivered!

vv.10-17 Some names are familiar (**Mark**, the writer of the Gospel that goes by his name); some are not (**Aristarchus and Jesus, the one called Justus**). But they were all **co-workers with Paul in the Kingdom of God. And they were a great comfort to him**—even Mark, who had deserted Paul on his first missionary journey. A great disappointment. But Mark made a great come-back and Paul found him valuable (2 *Timothy* 4:11). **Epaphras** was a beloved co-worker (1:7-8) and one who **wrestled in prayer** for those of his own fellowship and beyond their walls. And a fellow prisoner (of his own free will) with Paul (*Philemon* 23). Then there is **dear Dr. Luke** who remained with Paul to the very end—through storms, shipwrecks, and hostility from the Jews and Romans. We are so indebted to him for his gospel with its beautiful Christmas story (chapter 2) and his book of history better known as Acts. The NT mentions **Demas** only three times—all by Paul: he is a co-worker (*Philemon* 24); then he is simply called Demas (without comment); and Paul's last remembrance of him is, "Demas has deserted me because he loves the things of this life" (2 *Timothy* 4:10). **Nympha** hosted a **church in her house**. That's her only mention in Scripture—she housed the church of Christ. Just an ordinary woman doing what she thought ought to be done—provide a place where the Word could be taught, the brothers and sisters could fellowship, and the Lord's Supper could be shared (see Acts 2:42). Anybody could do that, but Nympha did! And by inspiration of God Paul wrote her name into eternity's memory. Paul saves **Archippus** for last. It appears he was a minister in need of encouragement. Perhaps the false teachers had infiltrated the church at Colossae and the "flock of God" was being mangled (see Acts 20:29-30). Paul makes sure this young minister receives the support he desperately needs. There's Paul's heart—not thinking of himself as the "secret weapon" for the success of the young church—but always thinking of every member (whether known [Luke] or unknown [like Nympha]) as an essential part of the Body of Christ (see 1 *Corinthians* 12:27).

v.18 I wish I could see the smile on Paul's face when he wrote, "**May God's grace be with you.**" It was a grace is always sufficient kind of moment (2 *Corinthians* 12:9a). Sometimes it comes by the ministry of the Spirit (*John* 14:16-17); sometimes it comes through you and me (2 *Corinthians* 1:3-4). But God never fails us; never abandons us. That carried Paul, and it will carry us—whatever the situation.

APPLY

A

Be comfortable with some silence as people think back to the sermon or reread the text. Answer honestly. You don't have to answer every question.

1. What stuck out to you in what you heard in the sermon or read in the text?
2. In verse 2, Paul tells the church to pray "with an alert mind and a thankful heart". Why do you think it's important to pray that way?
3. Why is it so important for Christians to live wisely? What does it mean for you to live wisely in our culture?

4. Notice how many people Paul mentions by name. Why is it important for us to know people personally in our church?

R

RESPOND

The purpose of this section is to take action with the truths you're learning. Answer honestly. Find someone who will hold you accountable to living out your response to Scripture.

1. Paul says in verse 6, "let your conversation be gracious and attractive." Think about how you speak to others, are your words dripping with sarcasm? Could you label the topics you talk about with others as "gracious" and "attractive"?

This week be intentional to think about these two words and reflect on whether or not your language would be labelled this way by others.

2. We see in verse 17 that Paul tells the church to encourage Archippus by saying "be sure to carry out the ministry the Lord gave you." Who are you encouraging in your life that needs to hear it? Who do you see getting burnt out on serving or living with energy from the Lord because of the weight of their circumstances?

Reach out to that person this week and encourage them.