

Act With Wisdom: Living on Mission in Your Daily Life

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[0:00] We really want to encourage all of us to be involved in a small group. Because it allows us to be in a place where we can know each other and be known. Now, for some of us, we think, I don't want people to know me.

You actually need people to know you. We need to be known. We need to be seen. Loneliness is an epidemic in the United States. I've even seen it referred to as a mental health crisis.

And the antidote to loneliness is to be in small groups. Even smaller than this. Where you can be safe and talk and be heard and seen.

So I want to encourage you, whether you go on Monday night or Wednesday night or both, take advantage of those small groups. And as time goes on, we'll start to develop more and more of those. So we remove any excuse whatsoever from attending those.

I also want to mention, Michael Johnsrud had knee replacement surgery this week. On Monday, it went well. From what I've heard, from those who have endured that experience, the physical therapists are not particularly nice about it.

[1:11] So apparently, you get your knee replaced on one day, and you're up walking on it later that day or the next. So it's not a pleasant experience. But the rumor also is that it's a game changer in terms of freedom movement, feeling better.

And so just pray for Michael and Kate as they're dealing with this reduction short-term in mobility, but hopefully an increase as time goes on. We want to continue to keep them in our prayers.

And then kind of lead into the sermon. This morning, we sang the Lord's Prayer, Father, let your kingdom come. You know, we pray about or we sing these things, and sometimes we don't think about what we're singing.

And I want to focus our attention on that for a second. Father, let your kingdom come. And it's easy to just, with, forgive me for saying it this way, but with lazy thinking, just think we're looking off to some distant day, Revelation chapter 19, when Jesus will come back on his white stallion in all of his glory with us, if we're believers in Christ, behind him coming to bring his reign to the United States.

Well, that too. To the world. That's actually not what Jesus was talking about there. What he was talking about was the spread of the kingdom that began with his advent.

[2:39] And as he went about sharing the gospel, as John the Baptist was baptizing, even before Jesus went public, the kingdom of God was being brought to bear on time, on human history.

And that continues. When we pray, Father, let your kingdom come, what we're really praying, whether you know it or not, is God, use me as a person who is in Christ to bring your kingdom everywhere I go, because that's what we do.

I think I've told you the story. When we lived in the Dominican Republic, I would tell our volunteers, we're coming down on mission trips, when we go to Esperanza or Highbone or Laguna Salada, when you go into those places, I know God is at work there.

And they would say, well, how would you know that? Because you're going there. Because God has sent you as his emissaries, as his ambassadors into those communities to bring the gospel, to model it, to teach it.

The kingdom is spreading. The cool thing is you don't have to go on a mission trip to spread the kingdom. As a matter of fact, you just have to go to work, or go to Hy-Vee, or cross that scary border on your yard into the foreign territory of your neighbor's yard and get to know them.

[4:11] And as you do that, the kingdom of God is spreading. And we're bringing what we have in Christ to bear on the lives of the people around us. We're going to talk about that more this morning as we look at Colossians chapter 4.

I want to review first, though. Last week we talked about prayer. In chapter 4, verse 2, Paul said, devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.

He's giving general principles about prayer. Be devoted to prayer. And if you remember, devotion was this wholehearted focus on being people who pray.

In the analogies we used, devotion was the devotion of someone learning to play an instrument, or to master a craft. It takes real focus and continual practice to develop proficiency and skill and the ability to be able to practice prayer.

We think, but isn't prayer a dialogue with God? Yes. But you know what's interesting? We have to devote ourselves even to learning how to talk to each other.

[5:22] At first you think, well, does devotion, that picture of devotion, does that apply to prayer? A conversation with God? Absolutely. Because we need to learn how to talk to each other the same way.

We need to practice. If you watch me, and some of you have, if you see me out in public, I'm pretty good at connecting with people, at asking questions, at getting to know the barista at a coffee shop, or the checker at the grocery store, or just somebody who catches my attention.

You know, that's not a native skill. It took years of practice recognizing that I needed to know how to do that, so I devoted myself to learning how to connect with people.

Because I really believe that's a way that I carried the love of Jesus everywhere I went. And it terrified me at first. But I really felt convicted, and I practiced, I devoted myself to learn some conversational skills.

That same picture applies to devotion to prayer. We're learning skills to really talk to God, and to hear God, because prayer is reciprocal. It goes both ways.

[6:32] We need to devote ourselves to prayer. We need to practice. Not just privately, but publicly as well. We need to learn to pray as a community.

That goes back to our small groups, praying together there. That's an integral part of being part of a small group is praying for each other. Our Sunday morning prayer time at 9 o'clock. I really want to encourage you to be there.

I know there's a time that we want to fellowship and see each other. I'd encourage you for 15 minutes to learn the practice of prayer with other believers. It's a good opportunity. And then once a month, the third Sunday of the month, we have our prayer meeting.

We've been watching the attendance of that decline. I want to encourage you. A little kick in the pants. Come on on a Sunday night. It's only an hour. But again, it's an opportunity to learn how to pray together as a group of people.

We're devoted to prayer. And we also looked at it as prayer as the idea of devotion we show to a loved one or caring for a baby. Again, it's focus.

[7:38] We recognize it's a need. And then the other picture that Paul uses is that we are to be alert in prayer. We're always to be scanning. We're always looking. Who needs to be prayed for?

Maybe we should pray for Michael Johnsrud. You might have a conversation this morning with somebody and go, you know what? I need to pray for this person. And you know, when the Holy Spirit prompts you to pray, here's a novel idea.

Don't say, I'll pray for you. And I'm not questioning your motives. But if you're like me, I'm going to question your discipline. We say, I'll pray for you.

And then we get swept into going home and getting our lunch taken care of and taking care of the kids or watching the game or whatever. And we forget that we're going to pray for that person.

You know how you shortcut that lack of discipline? Or you undercut it? A new discipline. When the Spirit prompts you to pray for somebody, say, let me pray for you.

[8:35] And this might feel risky for some of you. Put a hand on their shoulder and pray for them right there in the moment. Pause just to ask God to work over in whatever need they've expressed to you in that moment.

That's a great practice. But we're alert in prayer. We're looking for opportunities to pray for each other. And we're open to share with each other where our needs lie.

To say, you know what? I'm struggling with this or I'm feeling this pain or I've got this going on in my family. Whatever the case may be, but we are open enough with each other that we're praying together.

So we're devoted to prayer. We're alert in prayer. But remember, Paul always associates prayer and thanksgiving. Philippians 4, be anxious for nothing, but in everything, pray with thanksgiving. Why are we thankful? It reminds us that God has worked in the past. He gives us hope. But as we talked about last week, this was the highlight of this passage.

[9:41] And I want to bring it back to you. As you learn to be alert to prayer, as you are alert to the needs around you, there's a very real danger that you become so focused on where are needs around me that suddenly it seems like everybody's got needs.

Because we do. And you run the risk of being so focused on people's needs, their hurts, their brokenness, their sin, and those things about yourself that it's very easy to stumble into despair and cynicism.

Maybe you pray for somebody they don't change. Or they don't change fast enough. Or you don't see it in your own life. And you start to think, oh, does this even work? Why am I doing this? We get cynical.

And then it becomes despair. The antidote to those things is thanksgiving. As we are grateful for what God has done, we're reminded that God is at work. And the thing that He did in the past, He will do again in the present and in the future.

God is faithful. And thanksgiving roots us in that. So we're devoted to prayer. We are alert in prayer. And we pray with thanksgiving.

[10:55] What we're talking about ultimately, and this is what we're being invited to in Colossians, is a conversational relationship with God. What is a conversational relationship?

Well, think about a conversation you have with a friend. The relationship you have with a friend.

You can step right into it and just start talking about whatever's at the top of your mind.

And it just flows right in. I'll give you kind of an odd example. I have a friend in Seattle that we have had gaps as long as 15 years between connecting.

And yet, when we're back together, it's like there wasn't a break. We just pick up where we left off and the conversation continues. I don't want you to have a 15-year break from God.

Don't misunderstand. God is always with you. But that's a conversational relationship. We have such a level of connection, my friend and I, that we can just flow right into talking about not just surface stuff, weather, his art, he's not a sports guy, so we don't talk about the Broncos.

[12:02] But whatever things we talk about, we just flow right into it. But we also talk, we're able to talk about deeper subjects without a warm-up. We can talk about our kids.

We can talk about our church life, our relationship with God, our hurts. Because we have a conversational relationship. That's what you're being invited to is a conversational relationship with God himself.

And that's important to understand that God is inviting you in. The door's open. Which leads to our next little piece of review.

The idea of obedience versus devotion. I brought you back to Colossians 2.23 over and over and over again. When we are focused on rules, when we're focused on obeying, we think that we can change ourselves, we can get the engine of our hearts, if you will, tuned, so we're functioning in a way that gives us access to God, that makes us acceptable to God, that we have to do it.

The phrase is, if it's to be, it's up to me. And this is what Paul said in response to that. You've heard it week after week. These are matters which have to be sure the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body.

[13:33] It feels right. I've got to get my life in order in order to talk to God. We just think that's the way it is because isn't that how we relate to each other?

Isn't that how we feel like we relate to our parents, to our boss, sadly even to our spouse? I have to earn access and I have to maintain, continue the work so that I still have access to that relationship?

But what does Paul say at the very last phrase? But these things are of no value against fleshly indulgence. In other words, we just can't muster up enough discipline to be good enough.

We just can't. The drive for obedience assumes that I must earn God's favor. God is distant. His arms are folded.

He's back to us. He doesn't want to talk to us. He's kind of ashamed of us. And we have to prove that we're worthy of his attention. We're worthy of his pride.

[14:36] The pride of a parent and their child. We have to prove something. That's the assumption about rules. And that assumption flies in the face of what we know is true about God if we'll take the time to look at it and remember it.

Obedience assumes that I have to earn God's favor it also implies I'm in a hole that I have to get myself out of. I'm not at zero.

I'm not at ground level. I'm down in this hole and I've got to pick myself up by my bootstraps in order to get to the ground level just to get to a starting point. That's not what the gospel teaches.

And yet we live that way. That's the trap that leads to this drive for obedience. It implies that God is distant and we have to figure out a way to get into his presence.

And what is driving us is this idea of mystery. Much of life doesn't make sense. We know that maybe God has an answer but if he's distant what do we do?

[15:48] So we try to fix ourselves in order to be good enough to have God fix the stuff that we can't handle. Brothers and sisters that is not what we have in Christ.

That is not it at all. Instead Paul uses the word devotions. Devote yourselves to prayer. Last week we looked at Acts 2.42.

Do you remember that? The new believers right after they got saved hearing Peter's first sermon in Acts chapter 2 all these people come to Christ and what did they do?

They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching to prayer to breaking of bread and fellowship.

They were together. They were on mission as we went further into that chapter.

More and more people were coming to Christ joining the church because these people were living out not obedience but a devotion to God.

[16:43] what they were modeling for us is what is involved in cultivating a relationship with God. It's this idea of devotion. So how is that different from obedience?

Well there's a couple of things that are really important to remember. It's another verse I keep reading to you. Colossians 3.12 so as those who have been chosen of God holy and beloved.

Those who have been chosen of God. You don't have to earn God's favor. You don't have to bang on the door of heaven being obnoxious enough that he will finally open the door and say what?

No, no. He says come on in. As a matter of fact in Revelation chapter 3 when Jesus is addressing the church at Laodicea which is lukewarm and doing nothing of any consequence it's not them knocking on the door to get access to God.

Oh no. There's somebody knocking on the door. It's Jesus saying behold I stand at the door and knock.

[18:07] If anyone will open to me I will come in to him and eat with him or her. God is taking the initiative you are already accepted.

If you are in Christ if you have trusted in Jesus that the work that he did on the cross was sufficient for the forgiveness of your sins and to give you access into the family of God it's not you storming the gates of heaven it's God saying come unto me all you that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.

What a difference. And this devotion that we're talking about isn't to storm the gates of heaven it's to facilitate and grow a relationship with God.

Now why are these things necessary? why is it necessary that we devote ourselves to these things? You know you've seen the graphic that I've put up of the Venn diagram.

I think that's the first slide if I remember correctly. Younger me didn't put it in my notes. Oh look at that there it is. Sometimes younger me and I don't communicate very well. These things are not rules.

[19:26] These practices they're not the only ones but these practices Bible, prayer, worship, community, mission as the Holy Spirit works through those as we're devoted to these practices that are found in Acts 2 and all over the New Testament and actually all over the Bible what we're doing is we're coming into the presence of God and we're taking baby steps to step into something that is into a relationship with someone who's completely above and beyond our understanding and these are the means that God has provided through the work of the Holy Spirit by means of Jesus' work on the cross that we come into the presence of God.

You can know God. It says all over the Bible both explicitly and implicitly that when you seek God with your whole heart when you're seeking after Him He will be found.

He wants to be found. He's inviting you into relationship and so the devotion that we're looking at here is not this buffeting my body forcing it into a mold in order to earn God's favor.

No, no, no. It is these are tools that God uses to allow us to enter into that conversational relationship with God. God. One of my frustrations as I've been teaching through this series is my inability to communicate adequately the wonder, the awe that we should feel that we have access to the God who made us, who died on the cross for our sins.

We have access to an intimate conversational relationship with him and he's inviting us in. I just want to encourage you to think about what it means to be chosen of God, holy and beloved.

[21 : 36] Avail yourself of that opportunity. Seek God. It says in Hebrews, he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. And this is the means.

That's the means. You can't see what I'm pointing at here. These practices, they're not rules. They don't earn you God's favor. They show you the way to enter into and take possession of what you've already been given.

And if you don't understand the difference, pray and ask God to show you the difference, to help you understand, to help you to listen and hear him as he's directing you forward. Lord. As we segue into this next week, into this next sermon, there's some key concepts that we need to remember to understand the context of what we're going to talk about in Colossians 4 this morning.

First of all, is that idea of mystery. Life is a mystery. We've talked about that a lot. We don't understand why things go the way they go. We don't even know why we exist.

It's confusing. It's scary. Everything from the questions of existence to why do I suffer the things that I do? Why do I have the joys that I do? Why am I blessed the way I am blessed?

[22 : 51] Why am I cursed the way I am cursed? I mentioned last week, why do good things happen to bad people and why do bad things happen to good people? All of that is mystery. And we try to come to solutions, usually by making rules and disciplining ourselves.

That's what Paul's addressing in chapter 2. But the mystery revealed, the answer to the question, is Christ in you the hope of glory? Jesus said in John 14, 6, critically important verse, because it's Jesus' self-revelation to us.

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me. And when you look at me, this is verse 7, when you look at me, you see the Father.

When you look at me, you see the Father. God was getting down and speaking in words of one syllable to us so we could understand him to some degree, take advantage and step into his presence.

But we have to understand this idea of mystery. We have to get a hold of the fact that the mystery revealed is Christ in us. That is the ultimate gift that we receive when we put our trust in Christ and his work on the cross.

[24 : 13] He comes literally to live within us. We are never, ever truly alone. The Greek word for the Holy Spirit, the paraclete, is one who walks alongside.

someone who walks with you. You know the old hymn, he walks with me, he talks with me. That's our experience. That's what we have in Christ and that is how the mystery, all the mysteries of life are revealed, is in that relationship with God through Christ through the Holy Spirit.

And this understanding happens as we exercise these disciplines. Disciplining yourself for the purpose of godliness, 1 Timothy 4, don't misunderstand.

It's not obedience in order to conform to a standard to earn acceptance. That's not it. No. We discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness to learn how to better relate and understand our God and enter into that relationship.

And that's where we need to go. So as we go into chapter 4 verses 3, 4, 5, and 6, we're going to wrap up what Paul was talking about in terms of our practice and then the weeks to come we're going to be talking about different personalities of people that Paul cared for, that he was sending their greetings to the people of Colossae and it will allow you to get some hands-on tangible evidence of what it means to live out this relationship that we have with God.

[25 : 57] So let's read Colossians 4 and then we'll pray together and plunge ahead. I'm starting in verse 2 actually.

Devote yourselves to prayer keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving praying at the same time for us as well that God will open up to us a door for the word so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ which I also have been imprisoned that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders making the most of the opportunity let your speech always be with grace as though seasoned with salt so that you will know how you should respond to each person.

In other words we talk about Paul's engagement in mission in his own life and as we talk about what it looks like for us to be engaged in mission to be bringing your kingdom into the world Lord I pray that we would be motivated not just by the needs of the people that we see around us but also about the opportunity to work in partnership with you to reach people and share the gospel with other people and show them what we found and see them respond God we pray this in Jesus name amen so Paul's prayer request this is Colossians 4:3 praying at the same time for us as well that God will open up to us a door for the word so basically what Paul is saying is hey would you guys pray for me that I would have divine appointments would you ask God to put people in my path that are open and willing to hear the gospel so I want you to turn back a few pages you don't have to if you don't want to because I do have slides but in

Philippians chapter 1 which was written at the same time that Colossians was written we see an actual example of the answer to Paul's prayer as he's writing now remember Paul's in Rome we'll explain that in just a second this is Philippians chapter 1 verses 12-13 now I want you to know brethren that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else so we're going to look for a second and see what Paul's circumstances are because if Paul can look at his circumstances and see divine appointments I'm 99.9999% ensure that your circumstances also allow opportunity for divine appointments so what were Paul's circumstances if you want to turn there you don't have to because it slides we're going to turn to Acts 28 and we're going to look at where Paul is so I'll give you a little bit of background

Paul was arrested in Jerusalem as was prophesied he stood trial between a series of different authority figures and ultimately realized he wasn't going to get progress with these clowns so instead he said you know what I just appeal to Caesar I'm a Roman citizen that's my right I appeal to Caesar and so King Agrippa and his wife said fine go to Caesar off you go and so he was put on a ship they went across the Mediterranean there was a storm you can read that in Acts chapter 28 we're not covering that but ultimately he ended up in Rome and that's where we're going to pick up the narrative this is in Acts 28 starting at verse 16 when we entered Rome Paul was allowed to stay by himself with the soldier who was guarding him so Paul was in a position where he could rent his own quarters this is like house arrest they didn't have the ankle bracelets invented yet so instead he had a Roman soldier who was probably shackled to him that's what we call a divine appointment that poor guy you think it's rough listening to me preach for 45 or 50 minutes imagine being shackled to

[30:04] Paul and by the way what we skipped over was all the Jews the Jewish leaders around Rome and outside the city had come to talk to Paul because they had seen Christians showing up but they didn't have any information from headquarters in Jerusalem and they were curious and so Paul went through all the prophets all the Old Testament to lay out for the Jewish leaders this is who Jesus is this is why I the preeminent Pharisee became a Christian and you should too and here's this Roman guy oh my goodness is this guy ever going to shut up but he heard the gospel now verse 23 when they had said a day for Paul they came to him in his lodging in large numbers these are the Jews and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus from both the law of Moses and from the prophets from morning until evening kind of feel for that Roman soldier some were being persuaded by the things spoken but others would not believe which is a common response to the gospel but those were also divine appointments those Jewish leaders were curious and they came to hear Paul talk about this what was called the way they were learning about how Jesus was the fulfillment of the law the fulfillment of the prophets that he was the

Messiah and how to receive the forgiveness of sins and the relationship with God that God has always offered to the Jews and anybody who would believe Jesus was the way some were being persuaded some were not now verses 30 and 31 and he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him preaching the kingdom of God and teaching

concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness unhindered this guy's under house arrest he's shackled to a rotation of Roman guards he's writing letters those Roman soldiers got to hear Paul dictate Philippians Ephesians Colossians and the book of Philemon they got to be those guards got to be first hand eyewitnesses of what was going on they got to see Paul interacting with all these different people they got to hear him argue and rebut the arguments against

Jesus they saw him tell some of the people look if you don't believe you're just fulfilling what was said about that Isaiah was told in Isaiah 6 some are going to believe your report and some aren't that was repeated in Isaiah 53 as well you're just fulfilling that prophecy that you're too dumb to understand what's right in front of you that Jesus is the Messiah that Roman guard got to hear it let's go back to Philippians then back in Philippians chapter 1 I don't think I've got a slide for that nope I don't so I have to just turn there only a few pages back from Colossians 4 in Philippians chapter 1 this is Paul writing the Philippians about what's going on in the scene we just described now I want you to know brethren this is Philippians 1:12 I want you to know brethren that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ those guards talked to other guys who talked pretty soon the honor guard the praetorian guard were the elite soldiers who guarded

Caesar it got into Caesar's household there were believers seated all over in the Roman Empire how because a man was shackled in an apartment that he was renting and these men heard the gospel and shared it now what's interesting is they didn't all share it because they had gotten a new life they had accepted Jesus as their savior and wanted to share it with other people check this out further in Philippians chapter 1 most of the brethren trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear so those are the people that were on Paul's side that agreed with them they thought oh my goodness Paul is shackled to this hairy scary muscular Roman guy and he's still sharing the gospel well if he can do that I can do it and so Christians were sharing their faith in their workplace whatever it happened to be they were emboldened because they saw the boldness of

Christ that's one of the ways that we encourage one another is by sharing how God is working through us because when I see God working through you it emboldens me to go as well we're examples to one another but then in verse 15 some to be sure are preaching!

[35:22] even from envy and strife but some also from good will some of them this is only God could do this some of them are going back probably some of the Jewish leaders are saying to their families can you believe this guy this guy Paul you probably heard of him as Saul he was Gamaliel's star pupil there was hopes of him rising to the very peak as a Pharisee this guy had so much promise he was leading the charge against Christianity that first martyr yeah Stephen was stoned to death and Saul held his robes held the robes of the people that were stoning Stephen and encouraged them he was the number one cheerleader and then he went on and was going even up to Damascus to capture and to kill Christians to bring them under the justice of law can you believe!

this somebody did even with a skeptical tone even with a who would believe this nonsense as a preface people heard it and went wait a minute if Saul became Paul and endured the things that he endured was shipwrecked got to Rome he stuck in this apartment he shackled to a Roman and he still sharing the gospel and I I'm just making this up I'm a servant in Caesar's household and I heard somebody else talking about this and their life was changed I need to know more about this Jesus and when did they first hear about it from some!

sarcastic guy who can't believe so it doesn't matter the gospel still went out whether it was by people who were emboldened because they heard the gospel or sarcastic and incredulous that anybody would believe this stuff the gospel went out and Paul back to Colossians chapter 4 Paul was praying for more divine appointments praying at the same time for us as well that God will open up to us a door for the word what we see in Acts 28 in Philippians chapter 1 is actually the answer to that prayer and the application for us is very simple we need to pray that for each other we need to pray for opportunity that will have the eyes to see the opportunity when it's there and the courage to step into it even if you can't explain anything I'll give you an example and then we're going to move on this could be you in

John chapter 9 I love this chapter of John because I think it's funny we're not going to get into the funny part because that's later in the chapter but the bare bones of it is Jesus and the disciples are walking along and they see a guy who's blind he's been blind from birth and the question is who sinned that man or his parents that he was born blind and Jesus said what makes you think that

there was any sin involved at all maybe this is just an opportunity for the glory of God and he knelt down spit in some dirt that he picked up off the ground made a nice paste put it on the guy's eyes told him to wash when the he hadn't even seen Jesus yet and then the controversy arises because a blind guy can see and he doesn't know how it happened and the Pharisees came to him and said are you really the guy that was born blind yes how many times do

I have to tell you I'm the guy that was born blind well how did that happen I don't know I have a clue I was just begging and some guy smeared dirt on my face told me to go wash myself well duh and I'm clean I can see the line you need to remember is I was blind but now I see that's all he could say that's all he knew but it was enough that may be all you can say I don't know all I can tell you is I was a wreck and now I'm not I was afraid now I'm not I was an alcoholic now I'm free how'd that happen I don't know all I know is it's true all I know is Jesus is the reason I'm free from fear from the from whatever addiction hurt was causing me to wreck my life

[40:37] I'm free and you should get to know him well how do I do that I don't know but let me introduce you to somebody who does and then you can introduce that person to Jim Loney to Jack Redman to Cheryl to me to Jim Jim Potter I mean there's plenty of people here that can explain the gospel even if all you can say is I was blind but now I see that's enough you're looking for divine appointments and you're stepping into them Paul was asking the Colossian believers to pray that for him we should be praying that for each other and looking to see it fulfilled!

Paul goes on to say so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ for which I have also been imprisoned that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak one of the challenges with sharing the gospel is knowing how to make it clear how to keep it simple how to explain the essence without getting lost in all the confusing parts about the theology and what is atonement that means nothing so Paul the apostle Paul was saying would you pray that I could be clear about the way I explain the gospel to people so they'll understand what I'm saying that's a good thing to pray for each other that we would be able to share the gospel in a way that makes sense to the person that we're talking to one of things I can tell you definitively is that when you are in that place when somebody asks you why are you different what's going on in your life you were blind but now you see how that happened there are not two people involved in that conversation ever there are three always there's you there's the other person there's the

Holy Spirit because that divine appointment doesn't happen by accident God has orchestrated it and so as you speak the Holy Spirit is working through your words clumsy as they may feel and he's working in the hearts of the other person to help them understand maybe you're really clumsy explanation of the gospel it's okay you don't have to be Billy Graham you don't have to be this eloquent person who can speak the truth as a matter of fact Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13 that if you speak eloquently!

but you don't have love you're worthless if you just love the person enough to tell them about Jesus the Holy Spirit will bridge that gap just be faithful to deliver the message that's the core and that's what Paul is asking for prayer for that he will be able to make clear the gospel in the way he ought to speak so he goes from there this ends the section on prayer verse two general principles devote yourselves to prayer be alerted with thanksgiving verses three and four is Paul saying pray for me ask God to give me divine appointments ask God to give me clarity in the way I share the gospel with people because think about he was speaking to a diverse audience too when he was speaking to Jews he speaks the Old Testament because it's a common language but his members of the praetorian guard are there who knows maybe he had breaks he had an opportunity just to talk to the

Roman guard and the conversation there is very very different you can see an example of it I don't remember what chapter it is but when Paul went up to Mars Hill in Athens he didn't talk about the law and the prophets he talked to them about Greek mythology and this monument to the unknown God he spoke their language and so Paul was doing that in the context he was in speaking it clearly so he he's asking for prayer for that and now he's giving some guidelines and there's an assumption here that I don't want you to miss on that Venn diagram that we posted earlier is five things there we go thank you Martha mission is the last one that's not mission trips going across the globe that's on mission being like Jesus you are the hands and feet and mouth of Jesus into the world in which you find yourself in the context in which you find yourself wherever that may be you are on mission we need to develop a mindset that we're on mission my brother actually all three of my brothers served the military my youngest brother has combat experience trust me he was on mission all the

time his head was on his swivel meaning he's looking he's scanning he has to be on alert because there are threats all around he was on mission we need to be on mission not because we're threatened but because we have the answer to the questions that people are asking in [46:12] Jesus and so we need to have this mindset of being on mission and that's Paul's assumption that we as Christians are on mission now let me tell you something that frustrates me to no end I've talked about this before I got all these books on being on mission and discipleship and how to develop disciples and raise up leaders they do a horrible job of explaining why and if you're not careful you trip into obedience instead of devotion remember we talked about that earlier well you've got to make disciples you've got wrong answer being on mission is the tangible place that we experience relationship with God God is super efficient so when he is using you or me to share the gospel with somebody he's working in their lives that's pretty obvious but you know he's always working on your life too most of the lessons

I've learned have come in the context of me serving other people of me teaching other people of responding to their questions it's as we walk with God that's part of the apprenticeship being his follower remember that's our first core value is we're following Jesus we're his apprentice in the process of doing the work of being on mission the Holy Spirit is saying do this don't do that try this phrase pray this prayer and he's guiding us and he's saying don't worry I know you're afraid I'm with you I'm right here we gain support from his presence so this idea of being on mission is part and parcel of growing in your relationship with God because that's where you're working with him and he's teaching you you're actually working out these other four practices of Bible and prayer and community and worship it's in the messiness of connecting with other people and having your messy life and their messy life come together over conversation about Jesus you're having an opportunity to experience actually doing the work with Jesus just like the disciples got to see Jesus make that mud put it on the blind guy's eyes heal him and then lead him not just to physical healing but a new life because that's how John chapter 9 ends you have that privilege when you're on mission as a new Christian I think I've shared this with you before I got really into reading missionary biographies and what's very clear in those biographies is these people had a remarkable relationship with God a lot of suffering in those books but in the midst of it was this conversational relationship with God and I can remember as a 15 year old boy saying to my God I want that relationship with you I said alright you want that relationship you need to do what those people did I said alright I'll do it and here I am 45 years later still learning God uses our obedience our following him as a context for us to get to know him better to see that the promises are true that his Holy Spirit is present that he is a loving God as we see someone else come to Christ we're seeing that lived out so mission is an essential part of living out our faith in Christ so next time you're afraid to say something to somebody recognize I'm not alone here God wants to teach me something God help me to have courage to speak to this person to sound somewhat intelligent and show me what I need to learn and he'll do it he loves answering those prayers so Paul is assuming that they're on mission conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders making the most of the opportunity you're looking you're scanning that's part of being on mission there are opportunities to connect with people all the time most of the time it's not going to lead to some profound life change you share the entire gospel and the person says oh I've been looking for you my whole life they turn their life over to Jesus they pray their prayer and they enter into fellowship they start coming to tri-state that's very rare actually I can give you a number it's about one in seven not one in seven encounters one in seven people how do I know that because sociologists have observed in marketing that seven touches typically lead to a conversion that's why Coca-Cola puts their signs everywhere because seven impressions say oh I'm thirsty I should go get a Coke but it's at least seven impressions that's baked into who we are that's a marketing principle that's taking advantage of a biblical truth about us about how we're made and so God is at work in the people around you you may be the very first person who shares the gospel with somebody in a very small way just by being loving you might be the third the sixth or you might have the privilege of being the seventh oftentimes for most of us if we're number six we introduce this person who's now very interested for whatever reason and we take them to somebody who knows how to share the gospel well and that person leads them to Christ but make no mistake you may have to take your friend to an evangelist to seal the deal if you will but an evangelist work the person who's gifted in evangelism and sharing the gospel and leading somebody to make a decision their gift is predicated it assumes the other six people have been

faithful in executing delivery of the message in some small consistent way and through it all the Holy

[52:43] Spirit is working so be faithful with the role that you've been given it may feel like nothing but nothing in the hands of God is significant remember we're talking about the God who fed 5,000 with two fish and some loaves of bread your poor attempt to giving the gospel can certainly be enough in the hands of that God so conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders making the most of the opportunity you're looking it may be tangible it may be verbal I'll give you another example I just want to keep feeding you these things big surprise I was in a coffee shop I was in Pueblo Colorado having my quiet time and I overheard this young man pleading with his boss at a new job to give him some extra time because he didn't have what he needed to go to work he needed steel-toed boots and some work gloves and he was I don't think he was quite homeless but he was close he had no money he said please just get me enough time to get together the money so I can get these

I need the job give me space and he hung up the phone and the Holy Spirit said you need to go talk to that young man I don't have a whole lot of money and God said two fish and five loaves dog obey me I said okay so I sat down with this kid and said you know I overheard your conversation sorry I apologize if you think that's weird I was eavesdropping but I think God has put us together let's go get some boots and I'll get you to work so you can start today call your boss back tell him you'll be there in an hour and while you're doing that I'm going to get online and see who in Pueblo sells dill-toed boots discover

Walmart does so I went to Walmart bought him some boots took him to work I've never seen him again those types of actions communicate the gospel all I did was buy a cheap pair of boots and tell him God put us together and took him to work God can use you in that way you just have to be alert you just have to look and when you have an opportunity step into it pray and step into it and let God do what God's going to do let your speech always be with grace as though seasoned with salt so that you will know how you should respond to each person so you're lacing through your conversations the gospel it doesn't have to be Romans 3:23 says John 3:16 says no biblical principles just share what you know to be true you don't even have to reference the Bible that's God's problem but seasoned with salt means you're weaving through it the preservative power of God's word and sharing it with the person who's opposite you and as you do that you'll learn how to respond to each person you'll see what their need is and you'll address it with that kid it was boots it might be somebody who needs a meal it might be somebody who needs a hug it might be somebody who needs somebody to laugh with sometimes what people want is you know I just had this great thing happen and I need somebody to share it with cool tell me about it did you know God does that isn't he cool have a nice day you just shared the gospel they might invite you to more be willing to be accepted into more some of these examples I give you are ones where it was one off where I met them and we went our separate ways sometimes it's a neighbor that you see day after day after day after day or a co-worker step into those places let that relationship develop because it may be God's plan that you go deep into a relationship that's really not convenient but it's necessary for them and for you so we want to be prepared we want to step into it so as we wrap up I'm going to read you a quote from A.W.

Tozer you need to read A.W. Tozer I meant to bring his book up here with me and I forgot Tozer was the pastor of the Moody Bible Church through the middle of the 20th century had an 8th grade education brilliant man he studied the Bible he studied Shakespeare he studied whatever he studied on his knees God teach me because I don't have an 8th grade education and this is what he said this should be on the slide deck as well look it's there I love this this is a guy with an 8th grade education you're going to have to really think through what I'm about to read true religion confronts earth with heaven and brings eternity to bear upon time wow profound what does that mean true religion and undefiled before the father this is James 1:27 is this to visit widows and orphans in their affliction to place ourselves at the juncture between a person and their need and to meet that need when we do that the problems of earth are confronted by the provision of heaven what a blessing you get to be the one who provides the provision of heaven people are hopeless you are surrounded by hopeless people that hopelessness is confronted the things of earth are confronted by heaven when you bring the Jesus to bear on whatever circumstance you are in true religion confronts earth with heaven and brings eternity to bear upon time this isn't it folks you are surrounded by people who think it is it isn't this is just the beginning this is the warm up and we

need to share that with people the messenger of Christ though he speaks from
[59:03] God and that's us must also as the Quakers used to say speak to the condition of his hearers that means you have to speak that's what Paul's talking about in Colossians 4 you need to speak in a way that they can understand otherwise he will speak a language known only to himself be wary of Christian ease that's why we don't say substitutionary atonement when we're sharing the gospel it's meaningless without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin that's true but most people in Dubuque don't have any idea what that means you have to bring it into a way you have to translate it into words that they understand otherwise you will speak a language on all to yourself now listen to this his message your message must be not only timeless but timely timeless is the gospel timely is the gospel brought down to a place where the person you're talking to can understand it you must speak to your generation you must speak to the people in your context

I can't I'm not there but you can you're there step into it that's the life that God has planned for us and in doing that not only will you bring the gospel into someone else's life but you will experience a depth to your relationship with God that you could not experience otherwise but when you walk out that discipline of sharing the gospel of figuring out how to communicate it meaningfully to the other person you will go deeper in your relationship with God and you're going to hear because I don't think this only happens on judgment day you're going to hear a whisper good job I'm really proud of you the Holy Spirit does that as we go let's pray Lord Jesus thank you that we have the privilege of working in partnership with you that we can bring the gospel into the world that we advance the kingdom

God give us a boldness to do it however poorly we think we're how incapable we think we are help us remember the work is not ours but yours and move us Lord to pray for each other to be devoted to it God we pray this in Jesus name amen may