

Complete: Your New Self for the World – Colossians 4:2-6

I don't know if you've heard about the recent outbreak of the Ebola Virus in DR Congo and Uganda, but it's a significant crisis there. It seems like there's an outbreak of Ebola virus somewhere in this region every few years. This particular strain is not as deadly as others in the past, but they still estimate that the mortality rate is between 25% and 50%. It's hard to get exact numbers because the outbreak is in a rural area without much access to healthcare and where military conflict impacts the availability of treatment.

Whenever there's an outbreak of Ebola virus you can always count on one thing. A Christian doctor will contract the virus and there will be news reports about it in the west. This time the doctors name is Peter Stafford and his wife Rebekah, also a doctor, and their four children, were living and working in the Congo when Peter contracted the virus while performing surgery. They were there with a Christian missions organization based out of Pennsylvania. Dr. Stafford has recovered from the virus, and he and the family are back in the US.

Why does a Christian doctor get Ebola every time there's an outbreak? Because Christians do not live for themselves but for others and this includes going to difficult places and serving in tough spots. A Christian doctor always gets Ebola because a Christian doctor is always already there serving when these outbreaks happen. This outward looking perspective is built into our faith because our God looked outward to us and came to save us.

As we've been working through the main part of the book of Colossians you might get the impression that putting on the new self is simply a matter of new character, loving my family, and doing my work in a way that honors God. I get encouragement in my church and I grow, but I then hunker down, avoid the temptations of the world, invest in my family and move through life toward heaven. But Paul won't let us stay inside. He won't let us get comfortable within the walls of this church. He saves some of his most important instructions for the end of the main body of this letter here in 4:2-6. Here's what we will see today: **3** **Priorities of Your New Life that Serve the World.**

1. Persist in Prayer (v. 2)

When we get to verse 2 it should be clear that we have entered a new section of the book. Paul is no longer addressing specific relationships as we saw in 3:18-4:1. His focus here is different, but this section is still a part of the main body of the book and Paul is still helping us see what new life in Christ looks like. Except now, the new life compels us outward in concern for the world around us.

But before we can go outward, we need to be thoroughly grounded in our connection to Christ. And this happens through prayer. Look at verse 2. The basic instruction here is to “continue steadfastly” and then he gives us two descriptions of what that looks like.

To continue steadfastly in prayer is more about the consistency of prayer than the intensity of prayer. The new self is now united to Christ and that union shows itself by continual prayer. Listen to Paul’s comprehensive language in Ephesians 6:18 at the end of the armor of God passage.

There’s nothing else in the Christian life that has the power to change you more than consistent, persistent, habitual prayer. God promises that prayer will accomplish much in the world around us, but it radically alters us as well. But consistent prayer is the hard part for me. I want to pray like I breathe, but I struggle. What enables us to pray? Paul explains in verse 2 with these two descriptions.

First, being watchful in prayer motivates us to pray consistently. The idea here is found in Mark 14:38. To be watchful is the opposite of sleeping. It’s to be alert and awake. You don’t fall asleep when you are alert and watchful. You pray when you are alert to your need for prayer and your need for God’s help and work. You and I don’t pray because at the root of it, we don’t think we need to. We think we’ve got this. We think we can manage it, control it, adjust it, and make it. Be alert and pray because you need to.

Second, pray with thanksgiving. Paul has something of an obsession with thankfulness it seems. (1:12, 2:7, 3:15, 17) But thankfulness draws out prayer in our lives. If you struggle with consistency in prayer, begin with thankfulness and

watch your heart reach out to God to express gratitude. Combine this with your recognition of your need and persistence in prayer will come and change will happen in your heart and life. But don't just pray for yourself. Pray for God's work in the world which aligns you with God's heart.

2. Pray for Gospel Progress (vv. 3-4)

Look at the first line of verse 3, "at the same time". While you are praying about your own life, needs, and progress, look outward to the bigger picture. Continue in verse 3. Paul asks for them to remember his mission with the gospel. To open a door for the word is a metaphor he has used elsewhere to talk about the advancement of the gospel to people who haven't heard it before. Listen to Acts 14:27.

And what is the gospel? Look at the next phrase in verse 3. We've seen this language in Colossians a couple of times. Listen to Colossians 1:24-29. The mystery of Christ is the reality of Christ's life, death, and resurrection and the salvation that comes through it to the entire world, including the Gentiles.

So, Paul wants the Colossians to pray that God would open the door for the good news about Christ's work to move further into the world and to reach new people and save them. I want you to notice two sides of the language here. Paul wants a door to be opened for the word. It's almost like the word of God, the gospel, is a personal agent with agency and power all its own. But then notice that Paul will declare the mystery and make it clear or reveal it through his proclamation of the gospel.

God opens the door for the gospel and as His servants articulate it clearly, the gospel actively works to convict of sin and draw unbelievers to Christ. But a key component of this mission is the prayers of God's people. Paul wants the Colossians involved in the mission by praying.

There's a great danger for us at WBC to get comfortable in learning, relationships, community, Bible studies, events, and Sunday worship. These are all biblical and good things, and the problem is not in doing them, but in getting entrenched in them. There's a shift that begins to happen in churches and in Christians where we

turn more inward and focus on ministry here and events here and people here and begin to neglect the lost and dying world out there.

How can we avoid that shift? How can we maintain a real passion to see unbelievers come to faith in Christ? Begin by praying for God's work to continue. Pray for foreign missionaries but pray for our church. Pray for the local community. Pray for unbelievers you know. Pray regularly for God to open the door and then prepare to make the gospel clear because God will provide opportunities.

3. Prepare for Gospel Conversations (vv. 5-6)

Now Paul turns from his own ministry in evangelism to the Colossians and how they should get involved. But notice his instructions. He doesn't order them to go out and preach on every street corner and to engage every individual they meet with the Romans Road. Neither does he want them to retreat into a corner and never say anything. Paul was strategic with the gospel as he went into new communities, and he wants the Colossians to handle themselves appropriately and boldly. Look at this balance in verse 5.

First, walk in wisdom toward outsiders. Outsiders are clearly those outside of the church and outside of the faith. Your walk has been a typical description of your way of life in Christ in Colossians. Listen to Colossians 2:6-7. Now wisdom defines your walk as it relates to unbelievers. At a very broad level in the Bible wisdom means skill. It means the ability to put knowledge into action for specific ends and goals. It's practical know-how. Wisdom in relationships with unbelievers means knowing how to handle myself to reflect Christ, love that person as an image bearer of God, and to hopefully speak the gospel into his or her life. And you see this last goal reflected in the language of verse 5.

Wisdom brings care in building the relationship and interacting with the person outside of Christ. Alternatively, the shortness of time and the reality of sin and judgment means I will take the opportunities that come to speak the truth clearly.

So, walk in wisdom, and let your speech be ruled by grace. Look at verse 6. One of the most important ways you can prepare the ground of that relationship for the

seed of the gospel is to speak with grace. This means that our words are kind, winsome, and attractive. Why does Paul add in this little visual here of our words being seasoned with salt?

The image of salt is only used a couple of other times in the NT and mainly it described the Christian's relationship to the world around us. Most well known are Jesus's words in the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5:13. We typically think of salt as a preservative, but in the OT one of its main uses was in sacrifices to indicate the reality of God's covenant with his people. Listen to Leviticus 2:13. So, I think to let your speech be with grace and seasoned with salt means to always represent God's gracious covenant with you in how you speak with unbelievers.

Now, imagine for a second that you walk in wisdom, that you are gracious, winsome, and kind in your friendships with unbelievers you know. That you show genuine concern and interest and you treat them with grace in your actions and speak words of grace to them. You reflect the love of God for you out to them. Also imagine that you are praying for that person and for God to provide a gospel opportunity. What do you think is going to happen? Do you think that the God who sent His Son to become man to save sinners is going to work and move to open that door? I think there's a strong chance he might. So be ready. Look at the end of verse 6.

There are two ways we are to be ready here. First, we are ready for the conversation because of the relationship that has developed and been cultivated. Second, we are ready by the knowledge of the gospel that helps us answer clearly and speak truthfully in the conversations we have. Prepare in both of these ways.

I mentioned earlier the Christian doctors who always seem to be in the middle of things when there's a medical need. God probably isn't calling any of you to pack up and head to the Congo and treat Ebola right now. But our new life in Christ urges us outward to serve the world. What does this mean for you? Pray. Pray for gospel advancement and prepare for gospel conversations. Don't retreat from the culture and from the world. Like these Christian doctors, put yourself in the middle of things. Open your mouth and speak with grace. Draw close in friendship

when you would rather withdraw. Let the heart of the Savior send you out on mission wherever God has placed you. Let's pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions – 6/21/26

- Think of a specific person you know who seems genuinely oriented outward toward others. What does that look like in practice?
- What's one challenge that keeps you from praying more regularly?
- Give an example of how prayer has changed you personally. Give an example of how you've seen prayer answered in the lives of others.
- What's one area where you often operate in self-sufficiency and this leads to a lack of prayer?
- The sermon suggested starting with thankfulness as a way into consistent prayer. Have you tried that — and does it actually work for you? What's one practice that could help you build it in?
- Has there been a time when your prayers for the lost have felt powerless? What truths would you share to encourage someone whose prayers seem useless?
- The sermon said there's a real danger for a church to turn inward, good things like community, Bible study, and events becoming the whole mission. Do you think that's a risk at WBC? What would be the signs?
- The sermon discussed the one extreme of thinking we need to share the Romans Road with every person we meet and the other extreme of never

having a gospel conversation. Which of these is more likely for you? Why? What do you do to challenge this tendency?

- Think about one current relationship you have with an unbeliever. What's one way you could cultivate that relationship with wisdom in the future?
- Do you feel prepared to "answer each person" with the gospel? Describe how you feel most ill-prepared?