

How Do I Live This Life Paul Has Described in Chapter 3?

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[0 : 00] If you have your Bibles, let's go to the book of Colossians chapter 4, and we're going to look at verses 2 through 6. Colossians chapter 4, verses 2 through 6.

I had the privilege last week of preaching in the church. I pastored for 25 years. They invited me back. The pastor was on vacation, and he had begun a study in Colossians. And he had gotten to chapter 4 and verse 2, and he said, Ralph, would you mind when you fill in, just continue the study?

So I did that, and after I prepared the message and preached it there, I thought, you know, this would be a good message to begin at First Baptist Pickens with, because it kind of tells us what we need to be about as a church and as individuals.

So I'm going to start there this morning. Because we haven't been engaged in the study of Colossians, I'm going to take just a couple of minutes and go back and give you a little background so that you'll kind of know exactly where we are when we come to this passage today.

This is a church that Paul, believe it or not, has never visited. He didn't plant this church. You know, most of the churches he writes to are churches he's previously been.

[1 : 04] He's visited. He's won some people to Christ. They formed a church. He writes them and gives them advice. Well, this is one he had never visited. Epaphras is apparently the one who started the church, planted the church, and then has become a friend of Paul.

And he's gone to Paul in prison in Rome in order to try to encourage Paul. But while he's there, he seizes the opportunity in what Pastor Wooden to sit down with one as great as Paul and say, Paul, I'm Patrick over in Colossae, and here's some problems that we've encountered.

So he tells them about two problems, and he addresses those in chapter 1 and 2. The first problem is who Jesus is. Believe it or not, they were confused about that. Some had come in and tried to teach false teachings, and they were not certain, is he fully man and not God, or fully God and not man, or is he both?

And so Paul settles that question in chapter 1, a brilliant discourse, where he says, here's exactly who Jesus is. If you haven't read it, go read the last half of chapter 1.

He gets to chapter 2, and he addresses another problem Paphras told him about. These people had come from a pagan background, some from a Jewish background, and they were wanting to incorporate practices of their earlier lifestyle in the worship of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 : 18] And Paul just simply says, hey, that's not good. You can't do that. Here's how you need to worship. When you get to chapter 3, and I've got to say, of all the chapters in the Bible, if I had to pick just one chapter, if I was being sent into exile, Colossians 3 is the chapter I'm absolutely positive I would take with me into exile.

And here's why. It tells us how to live effectively for Christ. And this is how it begins in chapter 3. He says, keep your eyes on things above.

Boy, it's hard to do that, isn't it? We get to mixing and meaningfully with people on this earth and with the ways of the world, and they're so contrary to the ways of God. Paul just says, keep your eyes on things above.

Think heavenly thoughts. Think about spiritual things. Build your life around that. And then he moves to things we need to stop doing. In fact, he uses a strong word. The Hallman translates it this way.

Put to death these things. That's pretty fine when you put something to death. He says, take off these evil practices and evil attitudes, and then put on the character of a Christian. And he describes that in chapter 3.

[3 : 23] It's a beautiful passage. We'll look at it sometime out here in the future in all likelihood. And he says, put on compassion and joy and patience. Be forgiving with one another and understanding.

Don't go off getting your feelings hurt so quickly. Just a beautiful passage about how we're to live. At the close of chapter 3, he turns to relationships. And he says, when you know Jesus, it impacts how you get along with others.

How husbands and wives get along. How parents and children get along. How people in the marketplace get along. Now we come to chapter 4 and verse 2. And here's how Paul's going to wind this up.

He's going to say, now I've outlined in chapter 3 this beautiful life in Jesus. Now let me just tell you, if you're not familiar with chapter 3, go read it this afternoon. When you read that, you'll come away saying, that's how I want to live as a believer.

I can't imagine any genuine believer not reading chapter 3 and saying, I want to live just like that. Here's a million dollar question. How do you live such a noble, godly, kingdom kind of life?

[4 : 25] And Paul gives us two words of advice here in chapter 4, verses 2 to 6. And I'm going to tell you my outline. I'm going to let the cat out of the bag this morning before I even preach it. Here are the two things you need to focus on.

He says, you need to always rely on God. And boy, that's true, isn't it? Have you ever tried to live the Christian life without really having God to help you through it? You just think I can modify my life a little bit.

I'll do this. I'll go to church. He says that one word, you've got to rely on the power of God. And secondly, you've got to always remind yourself 24-7, 365 days a year, you are on mission.

Now, that's hard to do, isn't it? I want to tell you, in my own life, I found this. It's easy on Sunday morning to be thinking about the things of God. But Monday, about 10 o'clock, if you're someone who works in an office, you know, well, it can get tough.

It can be trying, can't it, when everything's going wrong. Or when you're on that date on Friday night. Pretty easy to forget, man. I'm a child of God, and I'm here on mission. Or when you and your spouse have a disagreement about something.

[5 : 33] Boy, it's amazing how people who are officers of the church, Sunday school teachers, pastors, we can just in that moment almost forget, I've got a relationship with Christ that guides this relationship.

So, let's see what Paul has to say. Look with me to chapter 4. We're going to begin in verse 2. And I'm going to be reading from the Holman Christian Standard Bible. And there are a lot of good texts out there.

The ESV is a great text. I've chosen to read from the Holman this morning because of how it deals with verse 42. Most of your Bibles probably begin something like this. It says, continue or continue steadfastly in prayer, right?

Well, here's how the Holman puts it. Devote yourselves to prayer. I don't know about you, but I like that because the word devote is one of those words that's a graphic word.

That's not a word we just sling around. You know the word love, we find a lot of applications. I love apple pie. I love my car. I love my wife. This word devote, we just use it in certain situations.

[6 : 35] I want you to think about it for a minute. We use it when a husband or wife, have you ever seen somebody sit faithfully by the bedside of somebody who had some critical disease? Maybe they have Alzheimer's.

And that person who loves them, they just keep going back day after day after day. And they're so faithful. What do we say about that? Men, they're devoted to their spouse. And we've all seen moms or dads who have a sick child.

And men, they hold them in their arms. They'll sit there all night long in a rocking chair. And they're constantly taking their temperature and giving them medicine, doing everything they can for that child. We say that's a devoted parent.

Or those firemen who rush into a building that's ablaze while other people are rushing out. You know why they do that? Because they're devoted. I mean, they've given their lives to saving lives.

And so they're devoted to the task. We're getting ready to have the Olympics. I don't know about you. I look forward to that. These are typically young men and women who started as children in a particular sport.

[7 : 31] And they've developed their skills to now they're some of the best athletes in the world. And I want you to think about this. For the last four years especially, they've given themselves to preparing for the Olympics.

They get up in the morning and they go to bed at night thinking about their sport. They do it many, many hours a day. And why? Why? All to stand on the platform at the end of the competition for about two minutes and have the national anthem of their country play.

That's pretty making. That's devotion, right? What are you devoted to? I bet this morning if we just stopped and we went person to person to person, not everybody in the room, but a lot of you in this room, you would say, you know what?

There's something I'm devoted to. I'm devoted to my family. I'm devoted to my job. Some of you are devoted to your church. What are you devoted to? Back on September the 29th, 2016, it was six months before I retired, my daughter Angela gave me a Fitbit.

I didn't know a Fitbit from Adam. She said, Dad, if you'll put this on, it'll track your steps. I said, well, I already know. I don't get many. She said, but if you'll put this on, it'll track them for you.

[8 : 41] And I said, why would I want to track them? She said, because you ought to be walking so many steps a day. I said, well, how many steps? She said, well, go to the computer and find out. So I went online. The American Heart Association recommends you get 10,000 steps a day.

So she gave me the gift. And out of gratitude, I decided, well, let's just give it a whirl. I'll try today to get 10,000 steps. Well, about 10 o'clock that night, I was kind of proud of myself.

I looked down. I had 10,000 steps. I'd walk more than I'd have walked in a long, long time. But I got my 10,000 steps. So the next morning, I got up, and I thought, you know what? I think I can do that two days in a row.

I'll just see. So I walked some that morning. I walked some after lunch. And I walked some late in the afternoon. I walked some that night. And guess what? At the end of day, too, I had 10,000 steps on my watch.

And I did that for a week and then a month. And I thought, you know, wouldn't it be interesting if I could do this for six months? And so six months without missing a day, I was now retired, and I'm still walking.

[9 : 35] I'm so proud of myself. And then all of a sudden, I've developed an AFib problem. They had to put me in the hospital. And they shocked my heart three times in one day, right? Got me there with medicines trying to regulate things.

And I asked the doctor, can I walk and do this? And he said, yeah. I've got my 10,000 steps even in the hospital. I mean, about the fourth day I'm there, I'm making laps around the interior of the hospital. And I passed this nurse for about the 10th time.

And she says, man, you are a walking fool. And I got my 10,000 steps in. When I had walked for 1,000 days in a row without missing a day, my children had a party for them at our house.

And they gave me a box with 1,000 dimes and said, go buy yourself a pair of new tennis shoes, right? I've walked now for five years. Only this last year after some minor surgery did the doctor say, you've got to stop walking for just a few days.

The only days I've missed in nearly five years. Can I tell you something? I am devoted to walking. Now, before you get all excited or say, well, that guy's bright, I'm telling you for a reason.

[10 : 37] It's to my shame. And here's the shame. I've been preaching 50 years. I've been a believer since I was 14. And there's never been a time in my life, believe me, I pray regularly.

And I pray with passion. And I pray for people I know and for a lot of different things. But I can't honestly stand here and tell you I have ever been as devoted to praying as I have been to walk in these past five years.

Isn't that a shame? But I want to tell you something. It's not just a shame for a preacher. It's a shame for anybody who knows Jesus who says, I'm going to follow the Lord Jesus Christ to think that you can live this life and not be in constant communication with God.

Isn't that right? Are you devoted to prayer? If somebody had a videotape on you, if they put one of these pro cams or whatever it is on you and they followed your steps every day, well, at the end of the day, they conclude this.

You know what? That guy or gal, that man or that woman, that's somebody who is devoted to prayer. I want you to notice what else he says about prayer. He says, devote yourselves to prayer and stay alert.

[11 : 49] Stay alert. And he's talking about stay alert in the context of prayer and in living. Stay alert. Now, why would he tell us that? I think because Paul recognizes it's hard for people to stay focused.

It's hard for people to stay alert, to stay awake, to stay attentive. If you'll think about it, you'll kind of probably agree with me in that, won't you? I mean, did you, like me, ever get notes sent home by your teacher when you were a kid that said he needs to pay closer attention?

He talks a little too much and listens a little bit too little. Do you ever have a note sent home to your teacher? Like, my teachers, you send them pretty regularly to my house, right? He needs to pay better attention.

And do you ever fall asleep in church? Wake up that guy back there. No, I'm just kidding. We have trouble paying attention, don't we? I mean, we really and truly do. So Paul says stay on alert.

Here's why. Our world is changing at warp speed. Have you noticed that lately? I mean, it's not changing the way it did when I was a boy. You might go 10 years and there'd be some change.

[12 : 55] Or when I was a young adult, you might go five years and there'd be some change. Or politically, you might notice the landscape is changing the last decade. Can I tell you? It's changing almost hour by hour.

I mean, can you imagine in the last 20 years the change politically that has occurred? If our grandpas woke up from the dead, they wouldn't recognize the United States of America, right?

It's so changed. We need to spiritually be alert and we need to stay in tune with God in prayer. And then he says, pray with thanksgiving. Pray with thanksgiving.

If this morning we could capture your prayer list for the last 30 days, everything that you prayed about for the last 30, I hope it'd be a long list. But I want to ask you something. How many of those things on that prayer list would be a request versus how many of those things would be a moment of praise or thanksgiving?

Isn't it amazing how much we ask God for? The older I get, I've got to be honest with you. I said a moment ago I pray on a regular basis every morning, every night, during the day. But I want to tell you, a lot of my prayer is consumed for friends who are sick.

[14 : 05] Because the older I get, the older my friends get. The people I know the best, the older they get. The more difficulties they have. And I find I'm spending lots and lots of time lifting up people who have cancer and who have needs and praying for them and their families.

He says we need to make sure we give thanks. Do you do that? I've got a little grandson. I want you to meet him sometime. His name is Charlie. He's three years old. He can tear up an anvil, right? I mean, this kid just, he is wired.

When he was about two, we started telling him, his mom, his dad, me and Regina, our daughter, every time we'd see him, we'd say, if somebody gave him something, we'd say, like all of you, you know what you'd say, right? What do you say to him?

And that was his cue to say, thank you. And if he didn't know, sometimes he'd look at me like a deer in the headlight. I don't know what I'd say. You got more? You know? I'd say, what are you saying? And he'd say, thank you.

And he'd make you so pleased that he would know that. But you know what worries me? I've got a feeling my grandson Charlie remembers to say thank you better than a lot of us do to God. Can you think of things in this last week you prayed about, but you never got back to say, God, thank you for doing whatever it is you did in my life.

[15 : 12] Look at verse three. At the same time, pray also for us that God may open a door to us for the message to speak the mystery of the Messiah.

So Paul gets around now to saying, here's what I'd like you to engage in prayer for about me. Now, you've already read that verse, but if you hadn't read the verse, let me ask you.

What do you think, just knowing what I've told you so far about Colossians, where he is, he's in prison. What do you think he might have asked them to pray with him about? I'm guessing if Ralph was in prison, or you were in prison, at the top of our list would be, get me out of here, right?

Pray that I will be acquitted. Pray that I'll be well treated. Pray that they'll soon let me go. Pray that God will open the prison gates and let me out.

Now, you can take my word for this if you haven't read the book. You can start in chapter one, verse one, and read through chapter four, the last verse, and you know what? Not even a single time will Paul ever mention that.

[16 : 26] Not one time is he going to say, as I would have said so many times, hey, when you're praying, pray I soon get out of this place. It's not a good place to be.

Nobody wants to be in prison, but he never ever prays that. What he prays for and asks them to pray for is for an open door of evangelism. Pray that God will open the door for me to share the mystery of the Messiah.

Now, let's just be honest this morning. Nobody's been listening in on your prayers, but how often do you pray for anything evangelistic? If you're like a lot of us, you pray for your children, and for your spouse, and about your job, and about church, and church work, and about a variety of things, maybe for the nation and our president.

But how many of us ever get around and say, Lord, I want to be a witness for you. I want to share the mystery of the Messiah with somebody out there. Would you open the door for me to do that? And how many of us ever prayed that for our church?

I mean, you pray your church will meet the budget. You pray attendance will be good. You pray for your pastor. You pray for your staff. But how many of us ever say, Lord, you know what? First Baptist Pickens is here for a reason. We don't exist just to get along with each other.

[17 : 41] We don't exist just to minister to each other. Lord, we're on a mission, and that mission is to see this community come to know Christ. Do you ever pray for those open opportunities? The date was December 31, 1976, and it's a Saturday night about 11 o'clock.

I remember exactly where I was. I was in Glen Watts Lake House on Lake Norman in Troutman, North Carolina, and the following morning, I was going to become the pastor of Western Avenue Baptist Church.

I was going to preach my first sermon as their pastor. My wife had gone to bed. My daughter had gone to bed, and I purposefully waited for all of them to get out of the way, and I just knelt there in that living room, and I remember almost word for word what I prayed, because I just prayed the same prayer over and over.

I poured my heart out to God. I just cried. I wept. And I said, God, I surrendered to preach when I was 14, and I've been training in college, and I've been training in seminary, and I've done some staff work, and I pastored a small little church out in Texas, and it was just part-time.

And God, I really have a heart to see the world come to know you, but I haven't been very effective at it, and would you, Lord, when I start this work in the morning, would you allow me to get into people's homes and be able to face men face-to-face and ask them about their relationship with Christ and try to tell them about you and hope that your spirit moves on their heart and brings them to faith?

[19 : 08] I begged them to do that. The following morning, I preached. That afternoon, I participated in my first funeral. Two days later, I went into a man's home by the name of Kenneth Pierce. Kenneth had visited our church just to hear a concert coming to his wife.

She was a believer. He wasn't. So I went up to his house, took a friend of mine, Delmas Ferguson, with me, a guy who became one of my closest friends in life, and I just asked Ken about his salvation. He said, no, he wasn't a believer.

I went through the plan of salvation, and Ken Pierce received Christ, and he came and was the first one I baptized. I honored that promise to God for 15 years.

Every home I got in, I'd look at people, and I'd ask them, have you come to the place in your spiritual life that you know for certain if you died today, you'd go to heaven? And anybody who would give me the opportunity, I presented the gospel.

I didn't do it with a lot of skill. I just did the best I could do. But I want to tell you something. God blessed that prayer. And over those 15 years, I led hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people to faith in Christ and taught a couple hundred other people how to go into homes and do the same thing.

[20 : 20] And God just poured out his spirit, and we had a wonderful time. Now, there's a reason I'm telling you that. It's not to boast or brag. I'm telling you that for this reason. In all those years, in all those homes, it would have been somewhere in the low thousands, I'm sure.

You know how many times somebody ever looked at me and said, when I asked that first question, and they answered, and I started to tell them the gospel. You know how many people ever looked at me and said, I don't want to hear it.

Don't share your faith with me. You know how many times I ever got told no? One time in all those years. Not all those people received Christ. Some very politely said, no, I'm not ready to receive Christ.

That's okay. But only one time did anybody ever tell me no. Almost everywhere I went, even cold turkey, door to door, people would let me in. Now, let me bring you forward from 1977 to 2021.

Our world has radically, radically, radically changed. I used to keep in my car a notebook of prospects. And every Saturday and one day a week, I'd go out and I'd just hit those prospects.

[21 : 26] And I'd go to visit people. And I never remember people saying, you can't come into my home. When I came to pastor at Brushy Creek, it was that way for about five, six, seven years. But about the year 2000, I began to notice, along with a host of other pastors, all that had radically changed.

You know what became the most difficult task I faced as a pastor at Brushy Creek? And if you were talking to Fred or Brian or other staff members, I think they'd tell you the same. You know what one of the most difficult tasks became?

Getting information on people who come through the doors of your church to even be able to call them or go see them or visit them. I would offer to take people to dinner. I'd offer to take them to lunch. I'd offer to meet them in a coffee shop.

I want to tell you something. It is exponentially harder today to get into people's homes than it has ever, ever been. COVID has exponentially made that more difficult.

Do you understand that? We're a society now, in this country at least, I don't know about other countries, but in this country, we want to keep our distance. We're fearful of each other. We want to attend, but we want to attend in anonymity.

[22 : 32] We don't want folk to know us very, very well. And so if the church is going to continue to reach people, I want to tell you something. It's hard for you to envision because you've got a pretty good crowd here this morning. But 20, 30 years down the way, when a lot of our senior adults die, if we don't continue to share the gospel and find ways to interact with people and befriend people and bring them to faith in Christ, this is going to be a spiritual museum.

Do you hear what I'm saying to you? We'd better be praying, God, give us insight and wisdom and creativity to understand how do we engage people today with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I can tell you in part the secret I believe lays in this. Instead of us trying to get into their homes, we're going to have to change our strategy where we say come into our home. And we're going to do that by not having visitation programs, but by having believers in neighborhoods get to know their neighbors and say, hey, would you come down and share a hamburger with me?

And just get to know them and befriend them. And pretty soon you're able to share the gospel with them. Or to do that on the golf course or to do that in the office place, the marketplace, as we perform our sales responsibilities in our jobs.

It's learning to take the gospel to where people are. Look, if you will, at something else he says in that second verse, or second verse, I think it is, the mystery of the Messiah.

[23 : 58] What is this mystery of the Messiah? He's so excited about sharing. Do you know what that is? Here's the mystery of the Messiah. Get this. The mystery is that God is going to save us, though he is the offended one, by paying the penalty for our sin himself.

Who would have ever thought about it? I mean, who would have ever guessed that this God who is holy and righteous and perfect would be the one who is offended, but instead of expecting the offender to do something to save himself, he does something in our behalf.

He comes in the form of a man, his son Jesus, and goes to the cross and spills his blood that we might have salvation. And listen, that's why Paul is so excited, because the world has missed it.

The Romans think you get to God by being powerful. The Greeks think you get to God by being wise. It's the intellect. The Jew thinks, man, I'm in by birth. But what Paul is saying is this, it's none of those things.

It comes by rebirth, by putting faith in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. And he knows there's a world that needs to hear that message and will embrace it if they'll only be told.

[25 : 09] Now, notice what he says at the close of verse 3. I love this. For which I am in prison. He makes this statement. For which I am in prison. This declaring the mystery of the message of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's why I'm in prison. Here's the million dollar question. Why is he in prison? Is it really for preaching the gospel? From man's perspective, that's certainly how it looks.

And some of you, by actually knowing your Bibles, will be at a little bit of a disadvantage if you haven't studied this passage thoroughly. Because here's what you're thinking. Some of you are a pretty good Bible student. Say, well, wait a second.

I've read the book of Acts. I know why he's in prison. Remember, he goes to Jerusalem. And he preaches. And he stands up on the steps of the barracks. And the Romans have to come and rescue him because the Jewish mob is going to kill him.

And they take him to Caesarea Philippi. And then later, he appeals to Caesar. And they've sent him to Rome. You say, that's why he's in jail. And that's what he's saying. He's in prison for having preached the gospel. That's how it looks from man's perspective.

[26 : 11] But that's not even what Paul said. He's looking at this from God's perspective. And the way man looks at things and the way God looks at things can be altogether different, can't they? How many of you have ever flown an airplane?

Everybody here? Sometime or another, you've been up in a plane? You know the thing I notice most about flying the first time I ever flew? How different things look from 40,000 feet. You wander through the country and you see this farm and a track of land and a lot of corn or tomatoes or soybeans.

And you see another and another and another. But you just see what you can see out your windows. You get up at 40,000 feet and you see the whole countryside, right?

You see little boxes. That's a farm. And the changing of the soil color. And the changing of the green in the fields, right? And he just looks so different from 40,000 feet up.

Well, from down here on earth, those who knew Paul thought, he's in jail for having preached the gospel. But from God's perspective, he's saying something else.

[27 : 15] Look, if you will, at verse 4 and you'll see the key to it. So that I may reveal it as I am required to speak. He's speaking of this mystery of the Messiah.

He says, I want you to pray for an open door. That's why I'm in prison. So that I may reveal it as I am required to speak. And he's thinking futuristically. It's not what he has done that's landed him in prison.

But rather God has put him in prison for what he's about to do. Do you see that? Now this means yes and no and don't know, right? Do you understand what I'm saying there?

I want you to see that difference. It's not that I'm here because I have preached. I'm here because God has reassigned me. He's moved me from Jerusalem to Rome because I've got another preaching assignment.

And that's what I'm praying for you to open this door of opportunity about. Because I'm about to preach. And who's he going to preach to? He's going to preach to fellow inmates. He's going to preach to guards.

[28 : 17] And guess what? Here's the big one. One day he's going to stand before the most powerful man on earth, the Caesar himself. And he's going to declare Jesus to that man. Isn't that amazing? So, boy, he's in prison.

But what an opportunity he's got. Who needs to hear about Jesus more than guys in prison or the Roman Caesar himself? And here's a question for you. How many of you would like to be assigned sometime next week, next month, in the next six months, to a ministry in an oncology office?

Where you go and you hang out with people who are getting treated with chemotherapy for cancer? Or they're receiving radiation?

Or they're a doctor or a nurse who's dealing daily with sick and dying people? How many of you would like to spend the next six, eight months of your life just rubbing shoulders in those clinics and then putting an IV in your arm and losing your hair and being deathly sick or being the spouse of somebody who carries those people to the clinics and endures that for months and months on end?

And some of them have a wonderful ending and a lot of them never do. If I asked for volunteers this morning, I know already there won't be a hand go up in the room.

[29 : 46] And you won't see mine either. But I want to tell you something. While you're enjoying life and everything's good and you're just living the dream, so to speak, the day may come that, like Paul, God says, I'm going to relocate you.

Well, Lord, where are you going to put me? In a bigger church? Bigger Sunday school class? Better neighborhood? Better job? No. I'm going to put you in an oncology clinic.

And I want to ask you, where would you ever hope to go where you'd find more hurting people, more hungry people, people who are more open to the gospel, people who'd give anything to have a ray of sunshine and a ray of hope in their lives than in an oncology office?

Where would it be? I don't know where it'd be. So I want to tell you something. I don't know what God has in store for you, and I certainly don't know what he has in store for me. But I hope this.

I hope if that day comes and he assigns me to that oncology clinic, that I'll recognize I've got two choices. I can go screaming and kicking and angry with God and shaking my fist and saying, God, why did you allow that to happen to me?

[30 : 59] Or I can say, you know what? This wasn't what I would have picked for me, but you know what? This is where God has put me. And what an opportunity. What an opportunity to give people who are dying a chance of hope.

People who are just as anxious as they can be. Families of members who have cancer. There is anxious as they can be, and I can give them a word of hope, and they're going to embrace this truth because it's a life-giving truth.

Amen? You've got a choice about how you handle that. And then, secondly and finally, Paul tells these Colossians that every one of them need to live, not only relying on God, but constantly with the thought in mind, I am on mission.

Now, what is your mission, and to whom is your mission? Look at verse 5. Walk in wisdom toward outsiders. Now, I want to tell you, you just need to know this about my style.

When I preach and I ask a question, I never ask trick questions. So you can trust yourself. You know the answer, okay? Because a lot of times you'll ask a question, and people say, I think I know the answer, but I ain't going to say it because I might be wrong, and then everybody laughs at me.

[32 : 10] You won't be wrong. Who are these outsiders? Y'all still don't trust yourself, do you? Not me. I'm going to let Brian answer. I ain't going to say it. You know who the outsiders are.

Who are the outsiders? Lost people, right? There are people who don't know Christ. There are people who you don't want to share this mystery of the message with. And so he says, walk in wisdom toward lost people.

He's warning Christians, you want to live the Christian life? You want to be on mission? You want to accomplish this mission? You want to effectively bring lost people to Christ? And listen, if I ask you to raise your hand about that, I wish every hand in this room would go up and say, Pastor, that's what I want to do.

I want to be somebody who brings people to Christ, who introduces people to Christ. I know God's going to have to do the saving, but I want to tell people about Jesus. That's my life's mission, to tell people about Jesus.

Well, how do you do that? Walk in wisdom toward outsiders. Here's two or three things you need to keep in mind. One, if you're going to walk in wisdom toward, you better always remember that lost people are going to act.

[33 : 15] Are you ready for this? Because it seems to surprise a lot of believers. They're going to act lost. Let me just give you a heads up on that one. If you don't know it already, lost people are always going to act lost.

You know why? Because they're lost. That's right. They're lost. So they're not going to behave like church-going folk at First Baptist Church Pickens.

They're going to do things that you wouldn't dream of doing. They're going to do things that you find offensive. I can't tell you how many times in the course of my life I'd have members look at me and say, well, preacher, I went out there, I was going to say something to the guys I worked with or the ladies I worked with.

They're just pecans. They're just heathen. I mean, have you heard how they talk? They use bad words. Really?

They're lost. Do you expect them to use the king's English? They're lost. They're going to behave like lost people behave, right? They're going to drink too much.

[34 : 19] They're going to carouse. They're going to live perverted lifestyles. And I want to tell you something. If we're on mission, and our mission is to bring those people to faith in Christ, we better recognize we can't do anything to offend them and to make them come to place.

They're uncomfortable being around us because they know we're judgmental. Do you get that? We've got to go with it. We don't have to act the way they act. I don't have to behave the way they behave.

That's the second thing. If you're going to walk with them in wisdom, you need to act defensively. By that I mean this. You need to be on guard because you need to know Satan's going to be trying to use them to impact you rather than you impacting them.

And that's what disturbs me today. When I look at so many believers in the world, we're allowing the world to impact us more than we are impacting the world. My wife's on Facebook.

You give her a chance to be your friend and she'll be freeing you in a heartbeat and she's going to know everything about your life. She's going to read it. I mean, she will read it about 16 hours a day. I'm exaggerating, right? I don't ever get on the thing.

[35 : 23] And it's not because I think people who do are wicked or anything like that. It's a good medium for people to socially interact. But I don't do it because I get disappointed. And I'll tell you what disappoints me.

When I go on Facebook, I see people I've known for years who say they're believers who are acting as though they were lost. Saying mean and critical things and doing things and filming their self doing things and putting themselves on Facebook and I think, my goodness, I know lost people act lost, but you're a believer and you're acting lost.

Now, not everybody does that. Most people don't, but some do. So you need to guard, if you're a believer, if you're going to walk wisely with those who are outsiders, you need to make sure they're not having more impact on you than you're having on them.

Can I ask you quickly, just do a little quick self inventory and ask yourself about the lost friends you know. Do you have more influence on them or do they have more influence on you? And then there's a last thing and that is to be offensive.

And how do you be offensive toward those who are lost, outsiders? He tells us in verse 5 and 6 and I say this in close. Look at verse 5. Making the most of your time. There was an old translation years ago, it wasn't even a good translation, it was called the Cotton Pats version, but I like how they translated this verse.

[36 : 42] You know what they said about that? Use your time as though you had to buy it. It's a pretty good interpretation, isn't it? Use your time as though you had to buy it. Because here's what I found. We are pretty guarded with our wallets, right?

Every time the preacher preaches on money, where do you kind of put your hand on your back pocket and guard that thing right? But we are just wasteful with our time. I see people all the time who just blow time like it's water and don't think anything about it.

But let me tell you something, when you get my age, you value time. Because I can't get yesterday back. I can't spend this last hour of my life over.

When it's done, it's done. So I need to be careful about how I use my time. I'm 22 years old at the time. I'm a youth minister at First Baptist Church in Mount Pleasant. It's about 4.35 in the afternoon.

Everybody on our church staff is going home. I'm the only one in the building. And I hear the side door of our church rattling. I get up and I go and there's Sean Jones, 19 years old, big old boy, about 6'3", 280 pounds.

[37 : 47] And he's standing at the door, rattling the door. I go to the door and I say, Sean, can I help you? Yeah, I just wondered if you'd left yet. Thought I'd come in and see you for a minute if you got time. Sure, come on in. Walked in, sat down in my office.

I'm on one side of the desk. Sean's on the other side of the desk. We chewed the fat for about 30, 35 minutes. No particular conversation. Believe me, I reflected over it many times later. Nothing said out of the ordinary.

He says, well, I better go. He gets up and he walks to the door. I'll walk with him out. I turn to the right to go to my Volkswagen to get in the car and go home. He turns to the left and walks around the other side of the building. From where we stood to his front door was no further than from here to Main Street Pickens.

Just about 250 feet. When I got home, a couple hours later, I got a call. And somebody told me the most shocking news I could ever hear. Sean had walked into his bedroom closet when he got home.

His dad was gone. His mother deceased. He walked into his bedroom closet. This big old boy took off his belt, wrapped it around that bar in his closet and hung himself till he was dead.

[38 : 51] I don't know if that's ever happened to you, but I'll tell you what will happen to you before you die if you live to be as long as me. There's going to come a time where somebody's going to call you on the phone or you're going to see somebody in church or out on a field and they're going to say to you, hey, did you hear about so-and-so?

No, what happened to him? He died. She died. And here's what you're going to say. You're going to say, that can't be. I just saw him 30 minutes ago.

I just saw him two hours ago. They sat behind me in church. I saw him the other day at the grocery store. I talked. He looked so healthy. Right?

Paul says, if you realize you're on a mission, you better do this first of all. You better walk with the outsiders wisely and you had better use every moment because you don't know what time holds for anyone.

Make the most of your time. Here's the final verse and I close. Your speech should always be gracious. Seasoned with salt. I like that, don't you? Your speech should always be gracious.

[40 : 01] Right now, I could ask you to point to somebody in here who you know is like that and you could do it. We all know somebody who's just great. It don't matter. It doesn't matter what happens.

They're unflappable. They're just always gracious. They're just always kind. Maybe somebody says something that might hurt somebody else's face. Not theirs because they just brush it off.

They just smile. They go right on. They're not easily offended. They're not quick to anger. They're slow to speak. They're not always giving people advice, telling them how they need to straighten out their lives. They're just gracious.

They're just kind. They're just loving. He says, let your speech be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that, there's a reason for it, so that you may know how you should answer each person.

I close by telling you this. And if you think I'm partisan, you just don't know Ralph Carter and you're going to have to get to know him because I'm going to tell you something. I'm not crazy about either side politically.

[41 : 03] Okay? I know where I stand, but I'm going to keep that to me unless we have a private conversation. And this illustration is not in the least bit partisan. But I'll tell you something. Back in September, I think it was, it could have been the first of October.

I think it was the end of September. We had our first presidential debate. Remember that? That's two hours of my life I'll never get back. It was horrible.

They didn't talk about any of the issues. They just name called and tried to be spiteful to one another. They weren't civil to each other. They tried to get barbs on each other all night long.

Both sides did. It was just awful. They owed, in my opinion, the American people an apology when it was over. A few days later, President Trump got COVID, remember? They sent him to Walter Reed.

The whole nation felt bad. I hope they felt bad. I felt bad. And many people prayed. And among those, believe it or not, if you didn't hear this, Nancy Pelosi and Joe Biden contacted the president.

[42 : 10] And I don't know how they did it. If they did it by phone, if they sent a message through someone, if they texted, I don't know how they communicated. But the news said they had communicated with President Trump and wished President Trump and his family well.

that they were praying for him and that they hoped he'd have a speedy recovery and soon be back on the campaign trail. And here's my question. Do you think there's any chance at all, at all, that when President Trump got that message, whether he talked to them or he heard it, do you think there's any chance at all that he said, wow, they're nice people?

You know, you know, I believe that was heartfelt. I believe they, I wonder how many hours Nancy prayed for me. You think they thought that?

And if you think I'm being partisan, let me just quickly tell you, if it had been reversed and Joe Biden had gotten COVID or Nancy Pelosi had gotten COVID and President Trump had sent well wishes and said, I just want you to know, me and Melania are praying for you and I want you to be well soon and back on the campaign trail.

You think there's a chance in the world that the Biden camp, the Pelosi camp would have said, hmm, that was heartfelt. He's not such a bad guy after all. Any chance of that? Now listen to me.

[43 : 30] Because they're human beings and there's a decency about all of us, they might have actually meant that sincerely. I would hope. I would hope. I'm not going to judge them.

I would hope they mean it sincerely. But I know this. Whether they meant it sincerely or it was as fake and political as it could be. Neither party would have ever believed it coming out of the mouth to the others.

You know why? Because that ship had sailed. It's too late to be nice now. Too late to be winsome now. You already showed your true colors.

You've already been ungracious. And that ship sailed. Now here's how it impacts me and you. There are people we see that live lifestyles that we don't like. If we're real careful, we're looking for an opportunity to be a witness, but we've said so many things or had so many negative attitudes or treated them with such a standoffish approach in life.

They don't think when the time comes that they're actually open to the gospel. And listen, they will be at some point in their life. Something bad's going to happen in their life and there's going to be an opportunity. But don't think you can walk through that door because that ship sailed.

[44 : 42] They're not going to hear from you because you've already spoken to them in an ungracious fashion. So walk wisely. Here's the invitation today.

If you're here and you'd say, you know what? These two things I need in order to live for Christ to be devoted in prayer, I'm not devoted. And I just need to come with grips with that today and repent of it and do differently.

You say, how do I begin to have a devoted prayer life the same way I began walking? Walk. You begin to pray. You pray. You start today. You start just praying. How do I do the second thing of being on red alert all the time for people in my path who need Christ?

By doing the same thing. By beginning to walk wisely. By shutting your mouth. By learning to hold your opinions. By learning not to be offended. I want to tell you something. Believers have absolutely no right to be offended.

We have offended the holy God and he has forgiven us. How dare we act out in anger because someone has offended us. Who are we that we should be offended for the sake of the cross?

[45 : 50] Let's bow to the other prayer. Father, lead us and guide us in these moments to make decisions that we'll be so glad we made whether it's visible here at the altar or right there in the pew when we stand before you one day and give account of our lives.

For we make this prayer in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.