

THRIVING IN ISOLATION

“The Big Picture”

Colossians 4:2-6

Big picture – the complete perspective of an issue or a situation

This week we got some encouraging news from our governor as we are seeing some flattening of the curve and moving towards Phase one in reopening our economy. We are at a midpoint and a good time to look at the big picture. Get a perspective of living in isolation and thriving.

For Paul his imprisonment in Rome was being placed in a house with a Roman guard chained to his wrist day and night. He was under house arrest, in this situation for 2 years.

He was socially isolated. He could not even leave the house. He could have visitors who could visit him for only for a specified time. For two years it was him, the occasional visitors and the rotation of Roman guards. And yet he THRIVED!! He wrote 5 books of the NT from prison and today we will look at the letter he wrote to the church at Colossae...the book of Colossians. As he is closing out this letter, he gives a big picture perspective.

READ COLOSSIANS 4:2-6

I. Pray persistently (vs. 2)

“*continue steadfastly*” – in Greek it is one word implies persistence and perseverance in prayer. Not long prayers; but persistent.

The original idea of this word came to be used of a boat that always stands ready for someone to use. The point is that prayer is an activity which we should constantly be doing, regardless the circumstances.

Paul has done this in his isolation. **1:9, “...we have not ceased to pray for you...”** He is challenging them to live a life of continuous fervent prayer even as he is doing in isolation.

1. With an alert mind - “alert/watchful” – Be more observant.

Alert to temptation - keep your eyes open and don't be blindsided by temptation.

Same word that Jesus used in Matthew 26:41 when he pleaded with the disciples to watch and pray for Him at Gethsemane.

Matthew 26:41, “Watch and pray so that you will not enter into temptation.” Same thing Jesus told his disciples Paul is telling us.

Last week I reminded you that even though you are in isolation from others, you are not isolated from the power of God. Likewise, you are not isolated from the lure of temptation. Prolonged social isolation can weaken your defenses and lower your guard and allow Satan to get a foothold in certain areas of your life. Be watchful, be alert and pray lest you enter into temptation.

2. With a thankful heart

Starts with being thankful for all the great things that God has done and then anticipating the fulfillment of all that He has promised. Even when you are in the midst of obstacles, difficulties and isolation, you recognize that God is at work. He is sovereign, He is in control.

Love that passage in James with every good and perfect gift from above. Having a thankful heart maintains your zest and zeal for praying!

II. Pursue open doors to share the gospel (vs. 3-4)

“*at the same time pray for us...*” – **Family Feud:** Top two answers are on the board. I would buzz in and say: praying for my release; escape; better food; nicer guards; more visitors; successful trial. **Survey says:**

“that God would open us a door for the word” - He did not pray for an open door to escape but for an open door to get the gospel out to the community around him! His prayer was not for personal benefit or comfort but for the advancement of the work of the Kingdom of God!

Wants an open door to share with the rotation of guards in his house. To share with any visitors. When he gets his opportunity to speak at his trial there would be an open door where he would share the gospel.

ILLUS - During the 1980's there was a great deal of controversy about nuclear arsenals and the cold war between US and Russia. A journalist asked Billy Graham who was a leading evangelist during that day, about the massive loss of life in the event of a nuclear attack. His answer, “The death rate has always been the same 1:1; you are born and you will die. The most serious issue isn't whether everyone will die – they will, it is what happens when they come face-to-face with God.”

“mystery of Christ” – Colossians 1:27, “To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

The mystery is that salvation has come to the Jews and Gentiles (that means all of us) and it is through the indwelling of Christ. Christ indwells individual believers.

God created us to have a relationship with Him. But we chose to go our own way; disobey his words; and the biblical word for this is sin. We have all sinned against a holy God. The result is a life filled with brokenness, pain, guilt and regret. Now God is a God of justice and judgment; mercy and love.

The justice and judgment. Our sins separate us from God for eternity Love and mercy. He demonstrated His love by sending His Son Jesus to come to earth, live a sinless life and die on a cross to pay our payment for our sins. He was taken down and buried but three days later he was raised from the dead conquering sin and conquering death.

You have the choice to accept Him or reject Him. If you reject him, then you will spend eternity separated from him. If you accept Jesus, then He indwells you through the power of the Holy Spirit. You become a child of God. You are no longer separated from God and when you die, you will spend eternity with God in heaven. This is the mystery. Christ in you.

“the hope of glory” – With the indwelling Christ we have the resurrected life within us, and we will share in the fullness of glory when we step out of this world and into heaven.

ILLUS – recent funerals I have conducted

Paul says just give me an open door!

(vs. 4) – Remember we said top two answers. The second is that Paul would present the gospel clearly for all to understand.

Do you ever get nervous sharing the gospel with someone else? Even the greatest Christian that ever lived and wrote half of the New Testament is asking for this young church to pray that he will be able to clearly share the Gospel. So if you get a little nervous...you are in good company!

He did not just pursue the open doors, he walked through them.

Philippians 1:12-13, “And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. ¹³ For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ.”

Philippians 4:22, “All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household.”

ILLUS – Lisa Hogan Executive Director of Sav-A-Life in Vestavia Hills prays every day for open doors. Last week 5 young women came into this pregnancy care center contemplating an abortion and before they left all 5

heard the life-changing gospel and all 5 changed their minds and chose life. In fact one was 38 weeks pregnant and went into labor and they sent her to the hospital! 5 young mothers and 5 children lives radically changed.

ILLUS – Martin Young, pastor of Rising Brook Church in Stafford, England is constantly praying for God to give them an open door to share the gospel in their community. Last week the local authorities asked his church to take the lead in helping their community make it through COVID 19 virus!

There are numerous stories of our members engaging in gospel conversations in the midst of isolation. Focus not so much on when are you getting out of this isolation, but with whom can you share the good news of Jesus Christ while in isolation.

III. Position your life for Kingdom effectiveness (vs. 5-6)

A. Be wise

(vs. 5) - *“conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders”* - Christians' behavior toward unbelievers should be above reproach. Conduct your life in such a way that it will attract and convict the non-Christians around you.

“The reputation of the gospel is bound up with the behavior of those who claim to have experienced its saving power.” – F.F. Bruce

When you live wisely following God's commands, you show others Christ in your daily life. You have earned respect; a platform from which to share. You have positioned yourself for Kingdom effectiveness.

B. Be ready

“make the best use of your time” – Make the most of your time to share your faith with those who don’t know the Lord. Opportunities come and go and some never circle back around so we need to be ready.

Football coach, “Sitting on G, waiting on O”

Deacon prayer request of one in real estate: *Pray that my wife and I would have witnessing opportunities as we help folks find a home or sell their home. **Looking for open doors!***

C. Be gracious

(vs. 6) *“Let your speech always be gracious seasoned with salt”* – Both the content of words spoken and the manner in which you speak.

Christian conversation is to be marked by graciousness, purity and wholesomeness. Salt gives taste and flavor; gives liveliness to the conversation. As Christians we don’t need to be dull but lively and interesting!

D. Be prepared

“how you ought to answer each person” – Prepared to present the gospel. You should know how to answer objections and questions about the gospel, but do it with graciousness and sensitivity.

I want to encourage you to download a method of explaining the Gospel called 3 Circles. It is easy to use and illustrate. The app that contains it is called **Life on Mission**. It has the presentation, scripture verses and a short 4 minute video on how to effectively use this presentation.

Look for those doors of opportunity during this time of isolation. Share with your children, your spouse, your parents, your grandparents. You can even socially distant share with your neighbor...the gospel will travel 6 feet!

Some of you have never encountered Jesus; you have never asked Him to come into your heart. Today can be that day. Children who know the gospel and have been putting it off...you have not walked across that bridge. Today is a great day to make that decision, pray with your parents and become a child of God.

Adults watching who are tired of the brokenness and purposelessness of life. Today you can make that decision to receive Christ.

Single adult who is not a believer and yet your roommate is. You have had some conversations; you have asked some questions; you have investigated it, but you have never embraced it. Today in the midst of isolation, you can make that decision for Christ. Go on ask your roommate they can help you.

EX – Mike Wayman decision in isolation.

Prayer: Lord Jesus I know that I am a sinner; but I know that you are the Savior. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and come into my life. I turn from that sin and I choose to follow you from this moment forward. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

“On the bottom of our screen is a number. If you prayed that prayer, I’d love for you to take your cell phone right now and text GOSPEL to (205) 749-7244. We would love to rejoice with you, follow up with you and encourage you. So right now text GOSPEL (which means good news!) to this number on the bottom of the screen.

If you are joining us live and want to talk to someone, go to the lower right corner of the screen and click on “live prayer”. If you are watching us later, then email us at pray@shades.org. We care for you and we want to walk with you through these times and help you to thrive in isolation.

One final word is I want to encourage you to read the Book of Colossians this week. It is just four chapters but it can be a nourishment to your soul for this week. **CLOSE IN PRAYER**