

“Pray, Act, Watch” // Colossians 4:2–5 // First #5

Colossians 4... What an **amazing several weeks** it has been, as we’ve **worked our way** through the book of Colossians, pressing in on what it means for Jesus to **be first in our lives**.

- The **theme of Colossians** is that **because Jesus is first** (in creation), and he **went first** for us (in salvation), he should be first (in our prioritization.)
 - Listen, **the good news of the gospel** is that God doesn’t accept you because you are generous enough.
 - *That’s good news, right?* If he did, I’d always be wondering if I was generous *enough*.
 - The good news is that God’s **acceptance and love** are offered as a **free gift to all** who will receive it.
 - When it came **to love, he went first**.
 - **But in response to that, Paul says**, Jesus deserves to be first—to be pre-eminent—in our lives.

This is timely for us, **because putting Jesus first in our lives** means putting his mission first—and we believe God has called us to some bold things in the days ahead. They are exciting and we believe will lead to a lot of lives being changed.

Listen: **God has blessed this church**—and grown it—for a purpose.

- On the **first week** of this series I showed you a **10 minute video** that recounted the history of TSC and God’s faithfulness to us.
 - I’ve gotten **the most interesting comments** back, btw, on that video. **One of my favorites** was from someone who said: “You

Works consulted:

“One More,” Joby Martin

“Colossians 4:2–6,” John MacArthur

“Secret Scoreboard,” Steven Furtick

know, watching that, and seeing those images of you in those early years, I realized that the growth of this church just had to be God.” And I was like, “Yeah, wait, what? I think I **may have just been insulted**.” And they said, “Yeah, just you with your dorky-looking outfits and your Dumb-and-Dumber haircut, I thought, ‘No way all this could have happened **had it not been of God.**’” Then I knew I definitely was being *insulted* but I **had to agree: Only God**.

- **But God’s not done!**

- The worst thing to do is to **put a period** where God only put a comma.
- **100K new people** move to the Triangle every year.
- Furthermore, we have the audacious goal of **planting 1000 churches** in our lifetime. So far, we’re **at 252**—which means we’ve got 748 more to go.

BTW: The **faith you show in these seasons** always inspires me...

- You may have been trying to figure out what is on my **SHIRT...**
- **And the faith of this church inspires others** in ways you may never know about: I told you a couple of weeks ago that one of our goals God has given us is to plant 12 churches over the next 12 years in every ACC school town, **which I said proved...** move his people to plant churches
 - Joby: “Well, **you’ve forced my hand**. The CoE22 is officially adopting the mission of planting churches in each city of every SEC school.”

I hope you **are excited** by what you see God doing here. **Personally**, I feel like Paul, who said to the Colossians in 1:5–6, (my paraphrase of his words) “I rejoice that the gospel is growing deeper in your and wider in the world (through you)!”

- That's **what is happening** and if you're **excited to be a part** of it, say, "Amen!"

Well, **as your campus teams** just mentioned, we are **ending this series today with a time of commitment** in which we renew ourselves to Jesus being first in our lives in the area of finances... (for some, first time you've done something like this; for others, a renewal)

So, **we're going to look at Colossians 4** because Paul ends the letter by calling for the same kind of commitment that I'm calling you to.

For many of you, this moment at the end of our service is going to **be scary**. It's going to feel like that story I have told you about the first time a friend took me rappelling... I went with **a group of 4 guys**. None of us had been before and I got volunteered to go first... I'm standing up there on the edge and my friend told me, you are all strapped in, now lean your weight back.

- **Mentally, I knew what I was supposed to do**, but I just couldn't make my body do it.
- I'd been rock-climbing before. It's a new kind of faith. As if you are just falling off the cliff.
- I must have stood there for 5 minutes. **Eventually, I realized that my friends** would never let me live it down if I didn't do it, so I prayed to ask Jesus into my heart one more time...
- **Well, my friend...** he was not really trusting the rope. He was still mainly depending on his arms and legs to hold him up; he was just using the rope as a safety net.
- **I've told you before that this is a picture of the Christian life for many people:** You are going along fine until you come to a **moment of obedience that requires a new level of faith**—and you realize that what has gotten you here won't take you there and you're going to have to **trust Jesus in a new way** if you want to keep going.

I am praying that today you will be able to make that step of faith. Because it's one of the **most amazing, life changing** things you'll ever do.

- So, do me a favor: **Grab the card... our primary goal is that 100% of us...**
- Hold the card (if w/ spouse, hold it together) and we're going to pray...
- **Hey listen, if you're new with us**—this is your **1st week**—you've picked a really exciting moment to join us. This is what we are about and maybe God brought you here to join us!

MUSIC

- **(BTW, before we pray... sometimes people say,** "I don't like it when we talk about money in church." And honestly, I get your skepticism, but let me give you **two reasons** I feel like I have to:
 1. Jesus **said money was the primary competitor for God in our hearts**—and, as such, **he talked about money more** than any other earthly subject!
 - **If you think teachers** of God's word should never talk about money, you wouldn't have been a big fan of the teaching ministry of Jesus.
 - **You see, Jesus knew that until your walk with him radically penetrated** this area of your life, you very well might be deceiving ourselves as to the reality of our faith.
 - **IF WE GOT A BIG CHECK, WE'D STILL DO IT!** I've told you that this is so essential to our life as disciples that **if someone came in** and paid for everything... because this is not about meeting the financial needs of God. This is about Jesus having the first place in our hearts because that's what he deserves.
 - **GIVE IT SOMEWHERE ELSE IF YOU HAVE TO?** I've also **told you that if you can't get over some bad experience...** someone you've seen use this manipulatively... **I'm fine with you giving** somewhere, even if it's not here. **I hope one day you learn to trust us...**

2. The **second reason we talk about this is that** if we are going to be following Jesus as a church he's going to be sending us to mission. **He never calls us to sit and soak.** We are not to be a **big audience that dispenses religious services** for Christians.

ARMY

- We believe that with the privilege of knowing the gospel comes the responsibility to spread the gospel. To be generous for others as he was generous for us.
- We **believe this is the most urgent and most important mission on earth** and I make no apologies for wanting you to be a part of it. It's **not my mission**, it's ours, as the people of God.

So yeah, **I really want you to be involved...** So, here's **what I want you to do:** Take this card, and let's hold it up, like this—hold it up in the air, and wave it like you just don't care...

PRAYER

Paul **starts his conclusion** to the book of Colossians in chapter 4:

² Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving. ³ At the same time, pray also for us that God may open a door to us for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains, ⁴ so that I may make it known as I should.

⁵ Act wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time.

I see **primary 3 commands** in these verses...

I. "Pray for... Us" (4:2–4)

Specifically, **Paul asks them to pray for 3 things** (which are things you probably should be praying for yourself as well)

- A. **Vs. 4, For wisdom to fulfill 'gospel obligations'** ("so that I may make (the gospel) known as I should" (vs. 4)

- Paul wanted **wisdom to know how to fulfill** the particular ministry obligations God had given to him.
- As we've seen, Paul believed he **had been given a particular, personal assignment** in the kingdom of God.
 - **In chapter 1 he called it a commission**, a "stewardship;" something given only to him; something that if he didn't do it, wouldn't get done.
- **We see throughout Paul's letters that Paul believes** every Christian has been given one as well.
- **Sometimes we say around here**, "*Not everything that comes from heaven has your name on it.*" But something does.
 - **Not every part of the mission** is assigned to you. But some part is. **Something has your name on it.**
- And you are **responsible—obligated even—**to fulfill that. God considers it stealing from him—wicked—if you don't.
 - There are **certain people** in your life you are supposed to share Christ with.
 - You have been **certain gifts, talents and resources** to use for the Great Commission.
- So, that's the **first thing Paul prays for:** wisdom to perceive and fulfill his gospel obligations.
- (BTW, don't you **find it encouraging that Paul feels like he needs God to give him clarity** about what his assignment is? I **find that encouraging** because sometimes I don't feel totally sure what to do.
 - **Do you ever feel that way?** What does God **actually want** from me right now? Sometimes I wonder, "**Does he want me** to share Christ with this person? Or say this?"
 - **I have two primary sources of comfort** in moments like that: **First, I'm a sheep**, and as I've explained to you, sheep are helpless idiots. **Leave a sheep on his own** and he will ALWAYS get lost and die.
 - **Sheep need a shepherd to guide them and the good news is that** I've got a really good one who has

promised to guide me in paths of righteousness for his name sake.

- **My 2nd source of comfort** is that throughout the Bible God repeatedly demonstrates he can use whatever instruments he wants to accomplish his purposes—**he even spoke once to someone through a donkey**, and as my friend JM says ever since then he has continued to use jackasses to speak to people. Which is good news for you.
 - **And all God's people said...**
 - **God had a purpose for Paul**, and Paul prayed for wisdom to perceive what it was and the courage to fulfill it.
- B. **Second, vs. 3, Paul prayed For ability to pursue new 'gospel opportunities'** You see that in this phrase: (pray for us..."that God may open a door to us for the word" (vs. 3))—
- By this point in his life, **Paul had done a lot**—he'd been on several missionary journeys; he'd planted lots of churches; he'd spent a lot of time in prison and testified before bunches of Roman rulers. If there was ever anyone who could say, **"I've done my part, it's Paul."**
 - But here he is, asking God to open new doors for the gospel.
 - Jesus had said that there was **more joy in heaven** over the 1 that repents than 99 who already belong to him, which meant for Paul that as long as there was breath in his body, he'd keep reaching for that lost one.
 - He wasn't done; he never could be.
 - **I hope you understand that at this church we are not trying to grow an Empire**. We don't care on whit about being the biggest church in the Triangle or just growing for growth's sake—we just **believe eternity** is real and **lost people matter to God—he's still going after the 1**, so as long as we have opportunity we will keep serving and striving.
 - Because it's **not about the size of our church** we send out some of our best members to plant other churches
 - **1000th member: think about that...**

- Sometimes we do it right here in our own are, **like a few weeks ago** when we sent out about 51 of our people and one of our most beloved pastors, **Chuck Reed**, to start **ReBuild Fellowship in Durham**.
- That's **not the kind of thing that is good for our bottom line**—
 - It's not good for the size of our church;
 - it's not good for our bottom line financially: church plants like teenagers.
- **But it's good for the city and the Kingdom of God** and so by God's grace we'll do that.
- So, it's **not just about growing our church**; but we **have to be faithful** to respond to the ones God is bringing to us also, don't we? We aggressively plant churches and send them out, yet God continues to bring us people, so we have to expend to reach them, right?
 - How could **we call ourselves faithful** to Jesus and **not** do that?
 - **We don't want** have a "if you build it they will come" mentality. We do have a "if they're coming, God expects you to build something to facilitate them" one, though.
 - **Anything less is unfaithful** to the GC.
 - *So, like Paul, we are praying for God to open up new doors of ministry.*

Finally, Paul prays...

- C. **Vs. 3, For strength not to waste 'gospel circumstances'** You see that reflected in the phrase, ("for which I am in chains" vs. 3)
- Paul **sees his circumstances as divinely arranged** for the sake of the gospel, and he asks the Colossians to pray for strength not to waste those chains.
 - Most of you are not "in chains," but what if you **saw your circumstances in the same way?**

- I say **most of you are not in chains...** (I should hasten to add, with **2 locations** in prisons, some of you are in a way.) But **the point is, what if all of you, regardless of your situation**, saw those circumstances as divinely appointed for gospel purposes?
- **That's the promise of being a follower of Jesus!** All things in your life may not be easy, but they are all directed for gospel purposes!
- **Maybe you are sick** because God wants you to demonstrate to family members and friends or even your doctor that you have a hope that goes beyond physical sickness.
- **Maybe you didn't make the team or get the job** so you can show your friends that your identity is not wrapped up in having the great job or being on the team—you have a better and more secure identity as a child and servant of God.
- **Maybe you didn't get the raise** because God wants to teach you to value the things that really matter and to learn to be content with what you have.
- **Paul was in chains, but he was still looking for what God was doing.** He saw every **setback** as a **set-up** from God. What if you saw yours as the same way?
- **When it comes to generosity**, you should ask why God has put you in the circumstances he has put you in.
 - **Maybe God has prospered you or given you access to lots of wealth and privilege.** Praise God for that! Have you ever asked, “Why?” Why as God done this? Might it not be for this mission, at this time?
 - **One of my favorite unknown Christian history stories I that of Humphrey Monmouth.** (How'd you like to grow up with that name?) Many have heard of William Tyndale... he was the one who bravely translated the Bible into English. Up until the 16th century...
 - But you **would never have heard that story** was it not for William Monmouth
 - God put **Monmouth into Tyndale's life** at just the right time
 - Is **it really a stretch to think that God** does the same thing today? He gives some people the vision and others the resources.
 - **Some of you may have realized that as you considered those 5 big resources...**
 - BTW, I **saw something in a book recently** that I thought was a great perspective and I think some of you might find helpful. It was written a **very wealthy believer** who said that for most of his life he just assumed that all that he earned would pass to his kids—that's who it belonged to—and the question he considered was how much of it he should put into the kingdom of God. He said that while reading what Jesus taught about money, he realized that a better perspective was that it all belonged to God **out of which** he should bless his family.
 - He says his **mentality changed** from “It belongs to my family, how much should I give to God? “It belongs to God—how much does God want me to leave for my family!”
 - He says, “I want to be generous to my kids—really generous, but it **belongs to God and I've got to ask** why he gave it to me?”
 - This **generation of Christians** is responsible...
 - **God prospered me not to spoil my kids with—but to take the gospel forward in my generation.**
 - That's a better, more Jesus-focused way of looking at it. And it's also leaving a better inheritance for your kids.
 - **If you are what the world calls successful**, you should say, “God has sovereignly arranged my success for **gospel, kingdom purposes**. Am I using it that way?”

- **On the flip side, maybe you're not in a season of financial abundance**—and because of that you are not in a place to give large financial gifts.
 - Listen: **That's fine.** Don't feel guilty about that or beat yourself up.
 - **Paul says in Corinthians** that you can't give what you don't have and God is the one that ultimately controls your prosperity.
 - A friend of mine says, "**When God Abrahams me** (i.e. when God has really enriched and multiplies me), I want to be faithful to that. But when God Jobs me (where I feel like he has taken things from me), I want to be faithful in that."
 - **Faithfulness in either of those season looks different, but you can put Jesus first in both seasons.**
 - *For some of you who are more in a Job season, putting Jesus first is a simple matter of faith*—you **don't know how you are going to make ends** meet, and to put Jesus first you're going to have to really trust him—to test him...
 - Like we heard **La'Trell** say... There was a promise I believed when things were tight... and God gave me that promise to **test him and see** if he will really keep his promise to make sure all your needs are met.
 - **For some of you, this is what trusting Jesus looks like.** It may not be some huge, financial bottom-line changing gift, but it **represents your first and your best** and a declaration of trust in Jesus!
 - *For many of you, maybe most, you are in neither of the extremes... (You're not being Job'd or Abraham'd—you are wondering how to make ends meet but you're also not sitting on a lot of excess.)* You also have figure out what it means to **put Jesus first** in your circumstance.
 - It might be **paring back some lifestyle choices** so that Jesus gets the first and the best.
- I think here of the **Lenkers**... Their **goal is to get their offering** to Jesus to be the largest monthly payment they have.
- It could means **delaying some purchase**, putting off a **kitchen upgrade**; even **downsizing a home**.
- I know of one couple who told me they were planning to buy a **new car but instead bought a used one** and gave the rest...
- **For some, it means stretching toward a faith goal** God puts in your heart that you don't know how they will reach!
- **I know of one couple in our church** who felt like God had put a number in their heart... **more than they'd ever given before.** Nervous... not sure how they'd do it. She got an email this week saying that her salary would be increased by the exact amount, to the dollar of their increase.
- *I'm not saying that will always happen exactly...* B/c n I **know of others** who say, "Well, that didn't happen, but God used the commitment to break our dependence on money."
- **For all of us, in whatever circumstance we are—there is a way to obey Jesus and put him first.**
 - And he **really should come first—it will feel like rappelling.**
 - A couple of years ago somebody taught me something about the story of **Cain and Abel** that I'd never seen.

So Paul's first instruction in his conclusion was: PRAY FOR ME. That **he'd be able to make Jesus and his kingdom first** in everything: his gospel obligations, gospel opportunities, and gospel circumstances.

Before we go to commands 2 and 3 (which are much shorter and really just the application of this first one), **let me ask: Is this what you've been praying about?**

II. "Act wisely" (4:5)

- **After you have prayed** for clarity, "acting wisely" means **being aware of the preciousness** of time and the brief moment you have to accomplish what God wants in it.
 - **It's the kind of wisdom the psalmist prayed for in Ps. 90:12**, "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to learn wisdom." Help me grasp how short life is so I'll have the right priorities!
 - **It's the kind of wisdom Paul says that David lived with** (in a sermon he preached in the book of Acts) – "Now when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep." (Acts 13:36)
 - This is **what I want said of my life**. He fulfilled his purpose and then went to be with Jesus.
- Are you living with **that kind of wisdom**?
- Have you perceived the brevity of life and the preciousness of these few moments we have in it? Are you working at the task?
 - Listen, I know if you are young **it seems like life will go on forever. It doesn't:**
 - Only one life to live, will soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last.
 - The **death rate in America** is still 1 out of 1 and I can tell you it goes by SO fast.
 - **Sometimes V and I look** at each other and say, "How did **we both get to be in our mid 30's already**? How do we have **2 teenagers** living in our house?"
 - We were watching an **old sitcom** the other night from the early 80's that both of us had watched it as teenagers... and it just struck me as I was watching it that all the actors at the time were young, and beautiful; full of life and romance... They were the hot people of the day. **But they are not anymore.** I'd seen one of them recently in an article. And they weren't that good looking anymore. They definitely weren't young, hot, and invincible-looking. They were old, and wrinkly. And then it hit me... the same

amount of years has passed for me as these people. *Pretty soon I'm not going to be young and beautiful anymore.*

- "Brother, that ship has sailed."
- **Isaiah says that our earthly lives** Isaiah says, are like things written in the **sand** that the tide washes away... or **grass, green and beautiful** in one season, but gone in the next, replaced by something else.
- **Jesus said, in John 9:4:** "Work while it is day, for the night is coming when no man can work."
- *Only one life to live, twill soon be past...*
- **Only 2 things in life really last forever**—the Word of God the souls of people... INVEST there.
- **That's what Paul means when he says, "Act wisely."** *Be aware of the preciousness of time and make sure you fulfill your role.*
- **By the way, the admonition to 'act wisely' means**, of course, it's possible of acting foolishly.
 - "Acting foolishly" means **not taking eternity into account.**
 - Not investing in things that last forever.
 - Spending your life climbing the ladder of success only to find out it is leaning against the wrong building.
 - Providing a comfortable life for yourself only to enter eternity with nothing...
 - Or, "Acting foolishly" means **spending your life focused on keeping your family close and making them secure and leaving them a big pile of money** but not imparting to them the **one thing that really matters**—the wisdom that knows that life is not about accumulating stuff but investing in eternity!

Act wisely... And finally,

III. "Stay Alert" (4:2)

- As much as Paul had accomplished, he was **always on the lookout** for what God wanted to do next.
- **Again, never put a period** where God puts a comma.
- Paul knew **God wasn't done**. Jesus still cared about the 1 who was wandering.

- **Summit, God has done some amazing things!** But he's just getting started.
- We've got new people in the Triangle to reach, new lives to change, brokenness to heal, cities and nations to transform.
- **The faith and sacrifice of the 300 17 years ago was amazing is not enough to take us into this new day.** It's time for us listen to the voice of Jesus, put him first, and let God bring his power through us.
- **It's time to be the 2nd wave of the 1st generation.**
- **And, just as he did back then,** God will use simple, Spirit-prompted obedience as the conduit through which he pours out his power. **The 300:** he didn't need our resources or skill.
 - **Fav illustration:** Woodpecker illustration. ***That's us: faithful to our commission, alert for God's movements and ready for him to move.***

I've told you: I look back with a lot of affection toward that 1st group of 300. They prayed fervently, they acted wisely, and stayed alert.

- But in large part, **their day has past**.
 - Now, **some are still here...** and **they let me know a few weeks** ago that they didn't appreciate it that I implied they had all gone on to be with Jesus.
 - (BTW, WHO IS HERE? (hey, even if there's not one at your campus, show your appreciation, because there's someone standing somewhere; **if they are near you**, reach out and pat them on the back and say, 'Way to go.')
 - So, **there's a few left**, but in large part, their day has past, and this is a **new generation**—
- **Look around! Will THIS generation—will the people who are seated around you—will we offer ourselves** anew to God for what he wants to do *next*?
 - **One day I'll say, "How many of you were part of that 11K?"** Stand up! And everyone will clap and say, "I thought they were all dead."
- He's **still going after** the lost 1!

- **God brought you here to be a part of this!**
- You are supposed to be the **next wave of this 1st generation!**

Y'all, dream with me for a minute. If God did all we've seen with 300 sold-out, disciple-making disciples, what **could he do now with 11,000?**

- **I'm ready to go, and I want you to go...**

CHECK THIS OUT: [RECAP video](#)

--Now, take out the card --

Our goal is 100% of you! The reason I say that is because our primary goal is not a financial number. It is that 100% of you would have 1st generation faith and commit to putting Jesus first in the area of your finances.

- BTW, **good news:** A lot of our volunteer leaders and 100% of our pastoral/staff team—1000 people.
- I've told you **V and I are in:** first 6 months' salary: Initially a little scary, but the more we reflect on this, the more excited we are to see what God will do during these next two years.

First blank: self-assessment: I told you if it's 0, it's ok! **This represents your first financial engagement with the KoG**, and that is awesome.

Second blank:

- Ask: Does this **represent him getting our first** and best? / What makes a statement that says that he is my primary satisfaction and security?
- Does this number **represent a commitment that will change everything** in my life? Does this commitment say that **God is important** to me or that **everything** I have is actually God's and he comes FIRST?
- Is this what **I think the HS has lead me to?**

Stored resources: I **gave you an exercise:** to lay out 5 of the most valuable things in my life at his feet? Have I asked him, “*Is there one of these you want me to transfer into your kingdom?*” Or something else? Maybe just a gift from savings.

- One guy: living lavishly on our retirement; “lavish retirement” is called “heaven.” I’ll live simply on retirement and that became his gift.
- One guy a few years ago put in tickets to Duke Carolina at Cameron Indoor (I had a difficult time figuring out what to do with those... we could sell them for a lot of \$\$... but I could also really enjoy them and I’m sure I’d see some people at the game could pray for them... we sold them).
- **Last blank: All this is worksheet.** This card has a lot of blanks, but the only one you have to fill out is the **box at the bottom**. That’s your total commitment for the next **two years**.
 - **Make sure you do the total amount**—including your regular giving, your expanded giving, and for many of you, your “gifts from stored resources.”

As our band plays... we’re going to give you a few moments to think, pray, and write.

- If you’re married, of course, I want you to lean in and talk with your spouse.
- In a minute, I’ll **come back up and give you more instructions**. But just stay seated and take this time to think, write, and pray.
- Remember **our goal is that 100% of us** will make a first-generation commitment of faith.
- If you’ve already turned one in at ACN... if it’s the same number **go ahead and re-write that # down...**

[Band plays instrumentally while people think, pray, and write... approx 3 mins.]

Instructions for the Commitment Moment...

- Before we bring these forward, I want you to look at it—**FORGET what you think this gift will mean to the bottom line of the church. Put that out of your mind. Forget how your number compares to others**
 - **Does your gift represent YOUR first and best, a number that will change everything else in your life?**

Here’s what we’re going to do now: we’re going to **worship and commit together**. When you’re ready you come forward and drop your **commitment card** in one of these buckets.

- Then **head back to your seat** and keep worshipping!

