

**Text: Partnership in Ministry** (Colossians 4:2-6)

**ETS:** Paul told the Colossians to live as partners in the gospel

**ESS:** Believers are to live as partners in the gospel

**OSS:** I want Living Hope campuses to be intentional partners in the gospel.

**PQ: How can we be intentional partners?**

**Intro:**

### **Birth of the Waffle Cone Illustration**

*During the summer of 1904 an unlikely partnership was formed at the World's Fair in St. Louis. The summer was unusually hot, and people were searching the fair for something to help cool them off...A vendor named Arnold had just what they were looking for... ice cream. People lined up for what seemed like miles to get some of his cool and satisfying ice cream but there was one problem. Arnold was not prepared for the demand and ran out of paper bowls. Next to Arnold's ice cream booth was a man named Ernest... a pastry chef ... who was making a Persian wafer desert. Ernest also had a problem, his pastry was not selling. He noticed the problem Arnold was having and took some warm pastry and rolled it into a cone shape. He then went over and showed Arnold how the cone could hold a scoop of the ice cream. On that hot day during the World's Fair in St Louis... the wafer ice cream cone was born because a partnership was formed.*

Have you ever thought about how important partnerships are to God? There is so many great things people can achieve together. And Living Hope, that is the blessing of what we get to do together.

And I just want to take a moment to thank you for your partnership in the gospel. On February 13, 2022, Living Hope adopted its third campus on Dunbar Cave Rd. And because you give, we get to invest in our city together and incarnate the ministry of Jesus across the city of Clarksville. Sango, Tylertown, and Dunbar Cave campuses could not be possible apart from your partnership and investment in the

kingdom of God. So thank you for supporting the ministries of Living Hope.

Since we have been over there, God has been doing an incredible work in the hearts of our people and we are just getting started. When we first went over, there was little life left in the church. 12-16 members left in the church. There were no ministries outside of Sunday morning service. There were not any baptisms in the previous 5 years of the church. No kids and only one student present.

But because of your partnership in the gospel, we have seen the church grow. The average has been around 60 give or take. We have had seed families that have come over to help get this thing relaunched, and they have been such a blessing and joy to have. We have had 3 baptisms with one scheduled next week. We have launched new ministries including Sunday morning Bible Study, childcare, kids' ministry, student ministry huddles, men's, and women's midweek groups. We have launched most of our ministries. And here is the deal, we haven't even relaunched the church yet! God is already moving through the Dunbar Cave campus.

We have new tech, new sound, we have seen new faces, we have seen new spirit and life in the church. There is a lot of newness at the Dunbar Cave campus. And we have more to follow with renovations coming. And your investment in this campus has been such a blessing and we thank you for your participation in reaching the community of Clarksville through campus multiplication.

And we just praise and thank God for what He is doing. He is taking a once dead church and breathing new life into dry bones. Because God is still in the business of giving new life to that which is dead.

And He is using this church to do it. One family, three campuses going all in together. And this is what it is about, partnering together for the sake of the gospel. And that is what I want to talk to you

about today as we wrap up our Jesus Over Everything series. Believers are to live as partners in the gospel. Paul's challenge for us today is to continue to live as intentional partners in the gospel.

### **Read Colossians 4:2-6**

So as one family, three campuses, how can you and I make an intentional ministry impact as an partner in the gospel?

### **GOSPEL PARTNERSHIP INVOLVES PRAYER**

#### ***2 Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving.***

Paul tells the Colossians to devote themselves to prayer. Other translations say persevere. With this being a present tense verb, it means to continually preserve in prayer. The idea is to be busy in prayer. With all the darkness happening in the outside world around the church, the church at Colossae was challenged to be busy in prayer. And with all of the darkness in our city and in the world, we too should be busy in prayer together.

Prayer was the life force of the early church. When you read the first chapter in Acts, we see that after Jesus' ascension, the disciples went back to Jerusalem and prayed together where they were staying. As they waited upon the Holy Spirit to move, they prayed. The disciples were busy in prayer at the house they were staying at. Then in Acts 2, we see the disciples go to the Upper Room where the Holy Spirit fell upon them. And then we see the early church on fire for God, hungry for the word, continually growing in their faith, enjoying fellowship, taking care of each other's needs, and praying. Acts 2 says they continually devoted themselves to prayer. And we see a church that flourishes and continually sees people getting saved, lives changed, and growth in the church. And that is what we should hope to see across all of our campuses; a true encounter with God, filled by God's

spirit, the gospel being proclaimed, lives being changed, revival in our city, etc. And it is all ushered in through prayer. As we are anticipating the Holy Spirit to do a work through our campuses at Living Hope and in this city, we need to be busy in prayer.

Prayer is the fuel that drives the mission and vision of God has for His churches. Apart from prayer the church is powerless. And we as the church must devote ourselves to prayer. Our partnership and commitment to going to the throne of God together will make a difference in our campuses.

With the needs before us—building at Sango, land for Tylertown, Renovations and Revival at Dunbar, and ultimately gospel advancement in our city—we need to plead to the Lord together, we need to seek Him together, we need to knock on heavens doors and go to the throne of the Lord together in prayer. Oh what might happen if every single person at our campuses would commit to praying for the needs of the church and this community?

**"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be answered you (Matthew 7:7)."**

Paul's challenge for believers is for us to partner together through prayer.

#### **Be Alert**

And while we are busy in prayer, we need to be alert in prayer. Paul says devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert. The idea here is to be wide awake or alert. In other words, we are to be aware of what is going in the times and seasons of the church.

You remember that time Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane praying (Mark 14:32-42)? Jesus brought His disciples with Him and told them to pray with Him. And what did they do? They took a holy nap, amen? My kids know about them naps. Come noon, its time for

a cheese-it and a nap. If they don't nap, its all downhill... Unfortunately, for the disciples, it was not the right time to be sleeping. Due to their current circumstances and the betrayal that was about to take place, prayer was needed. It was a ripe season for prayer. It was the ripe time for prayer. It was a ripe moment for prayer. Jesus told the disciples to pray, and three times he went back to the disciples to check in and they were sleeping every time. Living Hope now is not the time to be sleeping in prayer. But we must be alive in prayer and alert.

Let me give you three ways we should be alert:

- 1) We need to be alert in what is going on in our culture. Paul wanted the believers to be alert and on guard against the heresies of their day. When I think of being watchful, I think of a guard tower with someone on the watch for the enemy, an attack or suspicious activity. Their duty is to protect their city and fellow citizens. Paul is saying to keep an eye out and pray. And if we are to push back darkness in our culture, we need to know what is going on in our city and world. And the way we win the battle is not to complain or railing against the culture. The battle is won through prayer. Paul says the battle is not between flesh and blood but against rulers, authorities, principalities, and spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places. Spiritual wars require spiritual weapons. And we need to arm ourselves with prayer. So be alert to the needs of others in the world.
- 2) We need to be aware of the needs of the church. There is so much opportunity before us. Now is the time for us to ask God to rain down His blessing, provision, wisdom, guidance, providence, etc. Now is the time to hit our knees and go before the Lord together. Land might be expensive. Building might be expensive. Renovations might be expensive. Challenge might be apparent. But in prayer, we will prosper

and prevail in the Lord. Our campuses need to be prayer partners.

- 3) Some interpret this verse to mean we need to be alert for the Lord's return. Praying in our current season while also recognizing the Lord could return at any moment. In Matthew 25, there is a parable that Jesus shares with His disciples. He tells them this:

"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the groom. 2 Five of them were foolish and five were wise. 3 When the foolish took their lamps, they didn't take oil with them; 4 but the wise ones took oil in their flasks with their lamps. 5 When the groom was delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. 6 "In the middle of the night there was a shout: 'Here's the groom! Come out to meet him.' 7 "Then all the virgins got up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish ones said to the wise ones, 'Give us some of your oil, because our lamps are going out.' "The wise ones answered, 'No, there won't be enough for us and for you. Go instead to those who sell oil, and buy some for yourselves. "When they had gone to buy some, the groom arrived, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet, and the door was shut. 11 Later the rest of the virgins also came and said, 'Master, master, open up for us! "He replied, 'Truly I tell you, I don't know you!' "Therefore be alert, because you don't know either the day or the hour."

What Paul may be telling the believers in Colossae is the same things Jesus told His disciples. Believers are to watch the times they are living in and be prepared for the Lord's return. You know there is great debate on whether or not we are in the last days. And in one sense we are, being that Christ has been resurrected and we are in the waiting period

for His return. But if we are in the last days, are you ready? Are you keeping a watch on your life? One of my favorite artists says it like this, "if you stay ready, you don't have to get ready." If you stay prepared, keeping an eye on your walk with Christ, then you will always be prepared for the Day of the Lord. One of the greatest ways you can stay ready is making the most of the times which includes prayer and ministry.

- 4) We need to be aware of when God answers prayers. Paul says be alert while giving thanks. We need to be grateful for the opportunity to participate in the divine mission of God in reaching the world with the hope of Jesus. God wants to use Living Hope and churches all over the world to give hope and make disciples. The Great Commission is not a chore or a burden but a privilege to be able to participate. And when Christ set you free and gave you new life, you were given the opportunity to give the same hope you have received from someone in need. So we need to be prayerful, mindful, watchful, and thankful. And our thanksgiving should not be determined by our circumstance. No matter what circumstances we are face with, we should always be thankful for all He has done in our life.

**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, <sup>4</sup> so that I may make it known as I should.**

Paul requests the believers continue to pray so that God might open a door.

### **OFF THE HINGES ILLUSTRATION**

We need to keep kicking on the door of prayer until the door that is preventing the opportunity is knocked off its hinges and the frame is

busted, and the door flies open. Persistent prayer is key to seeing a breakthrough both in your life and in this church.

Sometimes we fall short of seeing a breakthrough because we cease to pray. We quit too early in prayer. When we don't see immediate results, we quit. When things don't move as fast as we want them too, we give up. We shake our fist at God, get mad, and walk away frustrated. Do we not trust God in the waiting? Do we not trust that He will take us out of the valley of darkness and cause us to lie on green pastures?

Don't give up. Keep pressing in. Keep moving forward in prayer. And do not cease until you see the door flung open. Persist in prayer.

Paul caught wind of this, and he asked the disciples at Colossae for intercessory prayers. He knew prayer is powerful and it works. There is nothing like believers coming together to pray for one another consistently. We have seen God answer so many intercessory prayers here through this church. And we are to continue to prevail in prayer.

More importantly, Paul doesn't pray for superficial stuff. He prays for supernatural stuff. He doesn't pray for a door for success. He doesn't pray for a material gain. He doesn't pray for a bigger home. His home is a prison. He prays for a specific door to be opened which is a door for the gospel. He wants to continue preaching Christ and Christ alone. And he requests these believers to pray that all barriers, hinderances, or obstructions be removed so that the gospel will advance. We see Paul's heart for the evangelization of the world in Col 1:6 where Paul wanted the word of God to bear fruit and grow all throughout the world.

I hope this same passion would be evident in us. Do you pray for your lost neighbors? Do you pray for you lost coworkers? Do you pray for your lost family members? Do you pray for your lost friends?

If we want to see Christ do a work in their lives, we need to be busy in prayer for them.

Prayer also assumes we want to participate in the mission of God. We are called to Go and make disciples. This is God's mandate for us. Like Paul, we too need to have a heart for lost people and look for opportunities to share our faith.

Notice too that Paul's requests is focused on others rather than himself. Paul prays and ask for prayers for an open door. Initially, you might think Paul is asking to be freed from his prison chains. But Paul is not asking for release from his circumstances. Paul was others focused. Paul lived and breathed prayer for others. In chapter one we saw Paul rejoicing in prayer for the Colossians believers. He thank the Lord for them in prayer. In chapter two we saw Paul praying intensely for the believers while in prison. The Greek paints a picture of Paul being in an intense battle, sweating and fighting for the believers through prayer. And this is while he is in prison. Paul was not concerned about himself or his circumstances, he was others focused. Instead, he is asking for an opportunity to leverage his circumstance for the gospel!

You would think Paul would be thinking up solutions for a way out of his circumstances. You would think Paul would be consumed with thoughts of how to get out, what to do next, how to plead his case. But Paul embrace his circumstances and tries to find a way to leverage it for the gospel! "Not only was the gospel the cause of his imprisonment, but his imprisonment also became the platform for the cause of the gospel." Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1:4 that we go through trials to help others. There are two takeaways from this:

1) Your trials are not wasted. It is not for nothing. It is not wasted. It is an opportunity for you to put away the lies that Satan tells you and leverage it for the Lord. There is someone in your life, in your sphere of influence who needs to hear your story as a testimony to what

Christ has done. But it requires you to have an unwavering trust and dependence upon the Lord to say no matter what the circumstance is, I will not be shaken. Let the Lord turn you test into His testimony and leverage it for the Lord.

2) As partners in the gospel, we need to pray that God would open doors for us to continue giving hope to the lost. "He opens doors no man can close, and He closes doors no man can open." God has opened doors for us to partner together to give hope to our city through campus multiplication, mission opportunities, serving opportunities, and gospel conversations. And we are praying for more doors of opportunity for gospel movement in our city.

But let me warn you, if you start praying for God to open doors of opportunity, don't be surprised if the Holy Spirit impresses on your heart to get involved. I've heard it said like this, "Praying for witnessing opportunities trusts the Lord to open the doors, but He also uses these prayers to open our hearts." Ask yourself this, what part do I have to play here at Living Hope?

He will open up the opportunities for the gospel and will also put you in places to share the gospel. And we need to take advantage of the opportunities He gives us. Listen, we have to push back the fear inside of us that keeps us from telling people about the hope of Jesus. God is the one who opens and closes the mouth. The Holy Spirit is with us till the end of the age. Knowing what to say, how to say it, when to say it, where to go, and whom to say it to are all included in the Spirit-led guidance that witnessing opportunities require.

How can we be intentional in partnering together in the gospel? By starting with intercessory prayer for one another. Paul believes that prayer changes things and so do I. As we consider the needs of our campuses including new buildings, land at Tylertown, renovations

and revival at Dunbar, let's lock arms together and pray for each other. And we should be persistent at it until the Lord answers our prayers.

Just like the persistent widow in Luke 18 who would not stop begging until she got what she asked for, we should continually pray for our campuses until God opens the doors.

### **GOSPEL PARTNERSHIP INVOLVES GOSPEL REPRESENTATION**

***5 Act wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. 6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer each person.***

"After requesting prayer for his gospel ministry, Paul turns to the witness of the Colossians, challenging them to "be wise in the way you act toward outsiders"—that is, toward non-Christians, those outside the church. The Greek text reads "walk in wisdom," and the implication is that, as believers go about their lives in a pagan world, they need wisdom to make their encounters with unbelievers fruitful. Instead, his focus here is on lifestyle evangelism—living in such a way that "proclaims" Christ to the world."

Our behaviors can often times be testimony killers. You can't live like heaven on Sunday and hell on Monday and bear the name of Christ with integrity. Why would anyone in our life want to profess Christ and attend church if we look just as worldly as they do? When you place faith in Christ and find your identity in Him, you no longer represent yourself. You are a walking presentation of Christ to the world. As partners in the gospel, we represent Christ and our church to our world.

It's interesting that the early church in Acts was bold in proclaiming the truth verbally and still had a good reputation in the community.

Living Hope, when we proclaim the gospel and live the gospel, it's amazing the impact we can have on our city. Not only do we need to proclaim it verbally—after all it is the Great Commission not the Great Suggestion—but we also need to live the gospel. Our life sends a message to the outside world. This is why Paul says here to walk in wisdom towards outsiders.

Every word you speak and every deed you do is a testimony to what you believe about Christ in that moment. What is your life saying about Christ? We represent Him not just on Sundays but also throughout the week. Not only that, as partners in ministry, we also, as members of Living Hope, represent Living Hope in our community.

Is your words or your deeds a hurdle for someone coming to faith? Are you influencing someone for Jesus or is the culture influencing you? We are called to live in the world but not of the world. And you have to use wisdom in how you live your life around unbelievers.

At the same time, "being wise to our surroundings is not a license to become cultural critics and cynics. In the midst of a culture that is volatile and hostile, the gospel of grace should be reinforced through the kind and compassionate tone in which we communicate. With sincere and sympathetic hearts, we must be "ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks [us] for a reason for the hope that is in [us]" (1 Pet 3:15)."

He also tells us to make the **best use of our time**. The original language here implies we need to "redeem or buy back the time." "It implies we recognize the fleeting nature of this life and the limited season of opportunity that is available for salvation. This understanding also magnifies the significance of every individual encounter and our urgency in leveraging every open door of opportunity for the gospel."

In other words, believers to use their time redemptively— to take advantage of every opportunity to magnify Christ and bring glory to his name. In a world already full of evil, our task is to fill it with good. Our time is precious and limited. But we are not here to build our life or to live for ourselves. We were created to know God and make Him know. That being the case, our time and schedules need to be leveraged for the Lord. If we are too busy for ministry, if we are too busy to serve, to share our faith, to fellowship with others, then we are too busy for Jesus. If you prioritize your life over these things, you may not be making the best use of your time.

So, we must take advantage quickly of the doors of opportunities God gives us, while at the same time using wisdom. And we must do this together. How can we be intentional partners in the gospel? By sharing the load of ministry. Get involved. Own your faith. Don't let sitting in a chair on a Sunday morning be the extend of your ministry participation. Get involved. Invest time, energy, and resources in your church. Seize the God-given gospel opportunities when the door in front of you is wide open.

**<sup>6</sup> Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.**

Paul uses a word picture, "seasoned with salt," to describe the winsome nature of our speech that distinguishes us from the world (cf. Matt 5:13) while inviting others to "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps 34:8)." Your speech should have the flavor of Christ.

Now that it is wintertime, it is gumbo time. I love a good gumbo. As a Louisiana native, I bleed roux. When it comes to gumbo, I am very picky. If it ain't seasoned right, I don't want it. Might not even try it if it ain't made by someone from Louisiana no offense my Tennesseans. If it's a good gumbo, it is going to be season right and have good flavor. And Louisiana native can tell when a gumbo is authentic.

Living Hope, do people in your life see your faith as authentic? Can they tell by your speech and conduct that you have the flavor of Christ?

Does your faith draw others to Christ or repel them? We have the ability to draw people to God by what we say. Our daily conversations and small talk with others should be edifying, uplifting, and encouraging. People should not have to question where we stand with Christ.

**RESPONSE: LIVE AS AN INTENTIONAL PARTNER**

**1. PRAY TOGETHER**

- a. **Prayer cannot be sporadic or haphazard. It requires consistency and discipline.**
- b. **Prayer cannot be enforced only when we have needs**

**2. PRAISE TOGETHER**

- a. **Don't minimize your circumstance but maximize your praise.**
- b. **Paul's letter written from prison has impacted the lives of millions of people. Leverage your circumstance for a kingdom impact.**

**3. PROCLAIM TOGETHER**

**"Some people never darken the door of the church because they never have been invited in."**