

*journeythrough...*



devotional  
Week 4

Colossians  
3:18-4:18

Read: Colossians 3:18-25

Have you ever wondered if you're doing it right?

Whether we're raising kids, going to school, or building a business, deep down, we want to be good at it. So we read all the books and listen to all the podcasts. We look at what others are doing and try to do the same. So when we read Paul's instructions for Christian households, they seem a bit underwhelming. He doesn't outline a 12-step strategy to success or unveil a long list of rules to follow. Instead, Paul says to serve one another and honour one another. Give your best. Do everything like you're doing it for God. "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward" (3:23-24). We make our heavenly Father proud when we see whatever He's put before us as an opportunity to bring Him glory. A lot of people will give us ideas of what success looks like, but Colossians 3:22 says not to obey others "by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord" (ESV).

We give our best not to make much of us, but to draw others to God. After all, God is not measuring our success based on the size of our business or our kids' careers, but how we honoured Him with them. God doesn't show favourites (Colossians 3:25). He's not holding out on you or holding back from you because your life doesn't look like the rest. So when you start wondering if you're doing it right, just ask: Am I loving and honouring those around me? This is God's measures of success.

Reflect:

- Is there any area of your life where you're giving a half-hearted effort? What's one way you give your best today?
- How are your relationships at home?
- Husbands, what would it look like to love your wife today?  
Wives, what's one way you could support your man today?

## Read: Colossians 4:1-14

Have you ever forgotten your place? We've all been there. We can get caught up in what we think is important, and forget that we aren't actually in charge. It happens at work, at home, and in our spiritual lives. Paul starts Colossians 4 by reminding the church who's the boss. And it's not us. "... you, too, serve a Master—God in heaven" (Colossians 4:1 MSG).

Our heavenly Father is sovereign over all of creation, including us. Prayer is how we align our hearts with our Father's heart. It's how we remember our place in this big, beautiful, broken world. This is why Paul encourages the Colossians to pray diligently and with gratitude. If we're consistently praying, we'll be continuously seeking and hearing from God. And if we're keeping our eyes open for reasons to be thankful, we'll be more likely to see God moving because we're alert and looking for Him in action. Also, notice what Paul asks for prayer for. He's in prison, but he's not asking for relief. He's asking for boldness and opportunities to share the Gospel. "God will open doors for telling the mystery of Christ, even while I'm locked up in this jail. Pray that every time I open my mouth I'll be able to make Christ plain as day to them" (4:3-4 MSG). When you can see your chains as your mission field, you know you're following your Father's will and not your own. The only way to get prayer wrong is not to pray. God loves us, and He wants to hear all of our desires and dreams. But God also knows more and sees more than we will ever comprehend. Learning to see Him as our loving parent, our just and fair master, will not only shape how we pray but also what we pray for.

Reflect:

- What's one way you've seen prayer align your thoughts and desires with God's?
- How might your prayers change if you started every conversation thanking God before telling Him your needs?

## Read: Colossians 4:5-6

At first glance, this is a strange request: "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person" (4:6). But consider what salt does. Salt brings the flavour out of food. That's right, your grandmother's insistence on salting the pasta water is actually backed by science. A little salt reduces bitterness and increases sweet, sour, and umami, which is desirable for sweet recipes. More salt suppresses sweetness and enhances umami, which is good for savory dishes.

The same way we use salt to bring the best out of our food, we're to use our words to bring the best out of those around us. "The goal is to bring out the best in others in a conversation, not put them down, not cut them out" (Col 4:6 MSG). Our words have the power to build each other up by pointing out what's good and where we see God at work. But if we're not covering conversations in grace, the same tongue that blesses one person can devastate another.

Proverbs 18:21 reminds us that "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." Our words have too much power not to think before we speak. But if we'll see every conversation as a God-ordained interaction, we'll find that we listen more than we speak. God is already having a conversation with your friends, your spouse, and your co-workers. He's just asking you to pick up in person where He left off in the spiritual. So instead of looking for an opening or waiting for your turn to speak, sense the divine opportunity before you and ask the Holy Spirit what He would have you say. You just might find that you know how you ought to answer each person.

Reflect:

- How can you encourage someone close to you today?
  - Where have you seen God at work in someone's life? Take a few minutes to call it out and let them know.

## Read: Colossians 4:7-9

Sometimes, encouragement comes through a hug and a homecooked meal. Other times, we find courage as we lock eyes and hear stories of God's faithfulness. And often, courage comes when the right word, the right prayer lands with all the force and power of hearing from God Himself. To encourage is to spur on, stir up, to give courage — all things that are hard to do from afar. This is what Paul wanted for the church in Colossae (4:8).

Paul wanted more for them than a halftime pep talk. He wanted them to feel and know how loved and precious they are. So Paul did what God did. He sent them his own. Tychicus and Onesimus were Paul's beloved brothers. When the church needed encouragement, Paul sent his community because some things can only be transferred through real, face-to-face interaction. We were made for community. To share our lives with one another and serve alongside one another like Paul, Tychicus, and Onesimus did. No one lives on mission for God alone. Even Jesus sent his disciples out two by two (Mark 6:7).

Who are the people you laugh harder with than anyone else? The people who know you and get this Jesus-following thing because they're doing it, too? Who will remind you who you are and how much God loves you? Who will stand by you on your good days and your worst days? We all need friends like this. Names might be filling your mind as you read that list of questions. But if you're wondering where to find friendships like Paul had with Tychicus and Onesimus, consider joining or forming a home group. Groups are where we find a spiritual family. Where we go beyond "How was your day?" to "How are you, really?" Groups are where friends become family, and we find the encouragement our hearts need.

Reflect:

- Is there anyone you can give courage to today?
- Is joining or starting a group your next step?

**Read: Colossians 4:10-11**

In Colossians 4:11, Paul thanks the believers who comforted him in his time of need. None of us has experienced first-century imprisonment, but we all know what it's like to go through a tough time. So how can we, like the believers in the early church, help fellow Christians who are going through difficulty?

**Don't be overly enthusiastic.** Proverbs 25:20 says, "Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar poured on a wound, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart." Instead, a quick hello of any form is deeply meaningful, reminding the person you do care.

**Don't forget the person who is hurting.** Follow up with a note, visit, or email, realizing that all may not be well within a few months or even years. Your patience with the healing process is a great encouragement to the broken.

**Don't reach out begrudgingly;** your hurting person can tell! You will be rewarded for your tender encouragement to other believers, so be joyful about it.

God will not forget "your work and the love you have shown Him as you have helped His people and continue to help them" (Hebrews 6:10).

Loving other believers is ultimately a way to love God, in fulfillment of the two greatest commandments — to love God with your whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself (Mark 12:28-31).

Reflect:

- How have you experienced God's love through others during a hard time?
- Who do you know who is in a dark place? What is one way you love that person well today?
- Do you know someone who has an ongoing struggle? What would it look like to care for that person over a longer period of time?

## Read Colossians 4:12-13

What does working hard look like to you? Sweating it out at the gym. Tackling that kitchen reno you've talked about for years. Moving a friend into their new apartment? When we think about hard work, we often think about blood, sweat, and tears. We rarely think about the kind of hard work Paul describes in Colossians 4:12 when we learn Epaphras was wrestling in prayer for his friends back home. Epaphras worked hard on their behalf and one way he did that was through prayer. Prayer doesn't have to be our first defence; it can also be our first line of attack. Epaphras' love for Christ compelled him to go on the offensive, praying that his brothers and sisters would love Jesus more and more and stand firm in their faith. Note what Epaphras does not pray for. He's not asking for their problems to come to an end. Often, when hard times come our way, we ask God to take those same hard things away. There's nothing wrong with wanting to see cancer healed, a broken heart mended, or a wayward child come home. But Epaphras reminds us that "God take it away" isn't the only way to pray for someone who is struggling. Instead, he's asking that they may grow into mature, confident believers, people whose faith is stronger for having been tested. In James 1:2-4 Jesus' brother writes:

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you encounter trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Allow perseverance to finish its work, so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

Hard work is good for us. Just like it grows our muscles physically, going to work in prayer builds our muscles spiritually.

Reflect:

- How would your prayer life change if you took Epaphras' approach to prayer?
- Who can you pray proactively for today?

## Read: Colossians 4:14-18

The closing lines of a letter are often the most important. The end is what the receiver will remember, what they will take away from all the stories, instructions, and ideas.

Most writers leave the reader with something to encourage, motivate, and compel them. The idea is to give the recipient something to hold onto, something to remember, and something to look forward to.

Paul's letter to the church in Colossae ends with a charge. Paul writes, "See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord" and "Remember my chains. Grace be with you" (Colossians 17-18). In other words, Paul was telling the church: Don't give up no matter what your current circumstances look like.

Paul wanted the church to remember his chains and how God delivered him. He wanted them to be encouraged that whatever prison they find themselves in, God's promise would set them free. He wanted them to know that if God was faithful to him, God would be faithful to them.

The same grace that delivered Paul from his chains is available to each of us today. Jesus' salvation is greater than your current situation. The same God who delivered Paul from his prison can deliver you, too.

### Reflect:

- Is there any situation where you're ready to give up? Based on everything you've read in Colossians, what do you think Paul would say to you?
- If you were writing a letter to your future self, what's one truth from this season you'd want to remember?