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LINK TO OTHERS

I love getting letters and cards. I appreciate people who take time to write a letter, put it in an envelope, and mail it to me. Everyday, I look forward to checking the mail. If I notice that someone has sent me a letter or card, I usually open that envelope first. I look at bills and other stuff later. Usually, someone writes me a letter to encourage me or inform me of something very important.

Our Bible verses for today's sermon are from a letter written by the apostle Paul. He had some very important words to share. Paul wrote this letter while he was in prison. Though he was in chains, he wanted to be linked with others. And one of the best ways for him to connect with others was through writing letters. He wrote this letter to the people in Colosse. Here's Colossians 4:2-6 from *The Bible: American Sign Language Translation*:

"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."

Through the Bible passage we just saw, I see three reasons why Paul wrote this part of his letter. Each word begins with the letter "E":

1. Encourage

First of all, Paul wrote this part of his letter to encourage the people in Colosse. Because he proclaimed Jesus, Paul was arrested and put in prison. Even though Paul was in prison, he still wanted to be linked to others. Because he was in prison, a great way for Paul to encourage others, especially those in Colosse, was through writing letters. In verse two, Paul encouraged the Colossians to *"devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful."* He also encouraged them to *"pray for us, too..."*

Paul's words may encourage us, too. Christians need to depend on each other. Christians experience times of discouragement and disappointment. When this happens, we need encouragement.

I remember several years ago, when I was a graduate student at Gallaudet University. One night I got a phone call that my grandfather had unexpectedly died from a massive heart attack. I was sad upon learning of this. I cried as I thought about the death of my grandfather whom I loved. During my time of sadness, I will never forget what my Christian friends at Gallaudet did for me. They got together and wrote encouraging messages inside a card. They gave me the card. It encouraged me very much during a time of sadness. To this day, I remember their encouragement very much and am thankful for their encouragement.

And non-Christians need encouragement, too. They need to know we care about them. Sending them a special card or letter with our own personal words is a great way to encourage them. Encouraging others is a great way to “link with others.”

So, one reason Paul wrote this letter was to encourage others.

2. Evangelize

Another reason Paul wrote these words in his letter to the people in Colosse was to encourage evangelism to happen. Yes, Paul encourages us to evangelize others.

Paul encouraged the people in Colosse to share Jesus with others. And, Paul wanted the Colossians to know he wanted to evangelize, too. Paul asked the Colossians to pray, in verses 3 and 4, *“that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ...”* and *“that I may proclaim it clearly...”*. Paul asked the Colossians for prayers so that Paul could evangelize. Also, in verse 5, Paul encouraged the Colossians to evangelize, too, when he wrote, *“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.”*

Paul knows that it is important to link to others so that we may evangelize to them. Paul encourages us to *“make the most of every opportunity”* to link with others and share Jesus with them.

The second reason Paul wrote this part of the letter was to encourage us to evangelize others.

3. Edify

Paul encourages us to edify others. Random House Webster’s Dictionary defines edify as *“to instruct and improve.”*

Paul had words that encourage us to instruct others how to improve. Paul writes in verse 6, *“Let your conversation be full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”*

How can we edify (teach) others and know *“how to answer everyone”*? In another one of Paul’s letters, as seen in the first part of Colossians 3:16, he encourages us to *“Let the word of*

Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom... We need to study the Bible, learn from God's Word, and then teach others. The more we know about what God says in the Bible, the more our conversations will "be full of grace." Also, the more we know the Bible, the better prepared we will be for answering the questions people ask us about God and His Son Jesus. After we teach God's Word, we can depend on God's Word to improve people's lives.

Paul includes the concepts of encouraging others, evangelizing others, and edifying others in another letter. Paul wrote this other letter to Timothy. Part of this letter is recorded in II Timothy 4:2, *"Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction."* The word "encourage" is in that verse. Preach the Word – that's evangelism. And the words *"correct, rebuke, with great patience and careful instruction"* are great words for describing what edify means.

Is there someone you know who is not a Christian? Someone who does not know about Jesus? Someone that needs encouragement? Link with them. You may do it through:

1. Encouraging them (writing a letter or card and sending it to them)
2. Evangelizing them (spending time and sharing Jesus with them)
3. Edifying them (teach them God's Word in the Bible and help improve their lives)

This is what Jesus wants us to do, too. Jesus gave this commission in Matthew 28:19-20a, *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you..."* Jesus wants us to encourage, evangelize, and edify. Jesus wants us to link with others.

Praise God – I have received many letters and cards encouraging me. Now, it's my turn to encourage others by writing letters to others. I know of one person who is discouraged right now. I'm going to write a card and mail it to encourage him. Maybe you can do that now, too.



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This printed manuscript is the English translation of a sermon presented in American Sign Language.

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All printed scripture is taken from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

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