

Let's take our Bibles and turn to Colossians chapter four and verses five and six. We're in a series called total grace. Grace is a wonderful gem, and we've been looking at different facets of it. Grace marks the beginning, the middle, and the end of the Christian life and beyond. And we've been trying to get our heads around that. We've looked at saving grace from Ephesians two. We've looked at strengthening grace from Hebrews four. And this morning we're coming back to look a second time at Colossians four where we're introduced to the thought of speaking grace.

Grace is given to us to speak graciously about the grace of God. And we didn't finish or exhaust our look at this and so let's stand as we read God's word and we come a second time. This is a message entitled Salty Speech. Let's break in actually at verse two just to pick up the context. "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving, meanwhile praying also for us that God would open to us a door for the word to speak the mystery of Christ for which I am also in chains that I may make it manifest as I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom towards those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you might know how you ought to answer each one."

You may be seated. During World War Two, the United States was at a loss in terms of how to deal with the German U-boat threat. Ships were being sunk at will, and in the middle of that context, Will Rogers, the great American humorist, in an interview with a reporter suggested an answer to that threat. Here's what he said, "Why don't we boil the oceans? The U-boats will turn pink, pop up to the surface, and then it will be easy to destroy them. It will be like shooting ducks in a pond." The reporter looks at him in incredulity and asked him how in the world would we get the oceans to boil? To which, Will Rogers replied, "I'm just telling you what to do. It's up to you to work out the details."

As I've thought about that and laughed at it, I've also thought about the fact I think that Christians feel the same way about Evangelism. We've been told why we ought to Evangelize. We've been told what Evangelism is. But we're all wanting to know how to do it. We've answered the why, the what, but not the how often in our training for Evangelism. We know what it is. Evangelism is the verbal communication of the word of the cross. It's when we share verbally with our neighbors and friends and family that Jesus died for our sins according to the scripture, and on the third day he rose again according to the scripture. Jesus has paid for our sin and Jesus has broken the back of death and brought light where there's darkness, and hope where there's despair, and life where there's death.

We communicate that clearly and faithfully. We do it hopefully in the power of the Holy Spirit. That's what Evangelism is. It's the verbal communication of the gospel. We know why we ought to do it. There's all kinds of reasons why you and I ought to share the gospel. Number one would be worship. Worship's a reason. Wasn't it John Piper who said that Evangelism exists because worship doesn't? Every one of our neighbors, every human being on planet Earth is a created being made in God's image, made to have a relationship with him. But, because they're born in sin, they're born separated from God, they don't have that relationship, and God longs for that relationship. God has made a means by which that relationship can take place through Jesus Christ.

Missions is us communicating God's love to a rebellious world. A world made in his image, but who sadly bow down to images, who sadly make things that which is all important. Compassion is another reason. Our heart breaks like Paul who says that he's in continual sorrow for his countrymen. There's many things that break our hearts. There are many things that cause compassion on our part. We see people in need, we see people in trouble, and our heart goes out to them. That's a good thing. But, it's also true of Evangelism. Man's greatest need is a relationship with Jesus Christ. The greatest threat that mankind

faces is the threat of an everlasting hell and separation from God, and compassion ultimately leads you, not just to give a cup of water, but to share the gospel of the living water, Jesus Christ.

Compassion drives us. Worship drives us. Obedience drives us. Christ has given us his marching orders, Matthew 28. What in the world is the church to be? The church is to be a witness for Jesus Christ. We're to go into all the world and preach the gospel. We're to make disciples of all nations. And so, why do we Evangelize? Because our neighbors don't worship the God that created them. Why do we Evangelize? Because our neighbors are in danger of everlasting destruction? Why do we Evangelize? Because Jesus told us to. We know the what, we know the why, but what about the how? How do we do it? What's the best method? What's the best means? Well, that's why we're coming back to Colossians chapter four.

Because in verses five through six, we have one of the few places in all of the New Testament where we are actually told how to witness, where Evangelism is explained in terms of a methodology. What we have here is apostolic guidelines to witnessing and so I want us to come back and look at this passage. You'll remember that it's tied to verses two through four. In verses two through four, the emphasis is on speaking to God about man. As Paul calls them to pray that God would give him the right words to say when an open door is presented to him to speak the mystery of Christ. In verses five to six, we have, the emphasis is on speaking to man about God. In verses two to four, we have the public preaching of God's word by those who are gifted of the Holy Spirit and appointed to preach men, like the apostle Paul.

Not everybody's called to do that. In verses two to four we have public preaching by some and the need to pray for them. In verses five through six, we have personal Evangelism by all. Every Christian is a witness. Every Christian is an ambassador. In verses five to six, Paul explains what that looks like. The context we said last time, really at the beginning of chapter three, Paul has turned from gospel indicatives to gospel imperatives. He has explained to them in the opening two chapters. The person and work of Christ he's giving them a theology of Christianity and now he kind of takes the rubber and makes it meet the road. What does that mean for Monday morning? What does that look like throughout the week? What is the church to do with relation to the outside world? What you have here is the calling and the character of the new man in Jesus and how the people of God relate to the outsider.

Look at verse five, "Walk in wisdom towards those who are outside." This is about life after noon on a Sunday, so to speak for us. How does the church relate to the world? He's talked to them about life inside the church, and how they ought to love each other, and minister to each other. Now, he talks about life outside the church. Concern and compassion for those without Christ. Now, there is one thing I don't want us to miss and then we'll actually get to the text. But, as I went back over just verses two through four and then verses five through six, one thing jumped out at me and that was Paul's passion for souls. I was challenged by that. You ought to be challenged by that. Continue to earnestly pray, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile pray for us also that God would open to us a door for the word to speak the mystery of Christ for which I am also in chains."

Here's the simple point that grabbed me. Paul is living behind closed doors. He's imprisoned. He's chained. He's incarcerated. He's locked up. But, when he asks them to pray, he doesn't ask, "Hey, pray that I get out of prison. Pray that the door opens. Pray for an exit strategy." He doesn't pray for a door out of prison, he prays for a door to greater Evangelism. That's striking. He doesn't pray for an exit door. He prays for an Evangelistic door. He doesn't pray for personal comfort or convenience, he prays for greater gospel impact. That's passion. He's happy to stay there, chained, so long as opportunities arise to preach the gospel, and they did. Because if you read the other prison epistle, Philippians, written

around the same time as Colossians, he tells us in Philippians one regarding his first imprisonment, which is the background to our letter, that these things have fallen out for the furtherance of the gospel.

He goes on in chapter four to tell us in Philippians that there were those in Caesar's household in the upper levels of government and palace personnel who were coming to faith in Jesus Christ. Someone has said, "Sometimes it takes more faith to stay in a place than to go to a place." It's a good word. When it comes to difficult circumstances, we've all got itchy feet. We all are looking for a parachute. Not Paul. Because sometimes it takes more faith to stay in a place than go to a place. Paul's wanting to stay chained up so long as doors open for the gospel. That's challenging, isn't it? Let's come and look at this passage, pick up where we left off. Now, remember we're in a series total grace. We're trying to remind ourselves that grace is at the beginning of the Christian life, in the middle of the Christian life, at the end of the Christian life, and it will meet us beyond this life.

We love the God of all grace. We love the gospel of his grace. We love His Son because His Son is the appearing of grace. The Holy Spirit has been sent to minister grace. We need to take this gem and look at the various facets and we've looked at saving grace, Ephesians two, we've looked at strengthening grace, Hebrews four, and we started to look here at Colossians four, speaking grace. Because notice in his words, "Let your speech always be with grace." Let's look at this methodology of Evangelism. If you were with us the last time and I'm not going to over this much, be tactful. As you engage those on the outside, the unbeliever, the unchurched, the unsaved, whatever word you want to give them, you'll notice how you're meant to interact with them with wisdom. Now, knowledge is the acquisition of facts. Wisdom is the proper application of those facts. It's skill for living. It's knowing what to do and when to do it for the glory of God when the rule book runs out.

You and I are to act wisely, to conduct ourselves smartly, to use some tact when we're dealing with those on the outside. If you go to the corresponding passage in Ephesians 5:15, you'll read where Paul says, "Walk circumspectly." Very interesting word. It's a word that means precision. It's like walk very carefully. In fact, that's how your translation might translate it. Mine says walk circumspectly, but walk carefully, judiciously. Don't go running into a situation. Go walking carefully into a situation. Know what you're going into, what you're going to do when you're there. Walk circumspectly when it comes to those on the outside. Be care in how you approach them. Think it out. Think it through. Be wise. I think I've shared this before, when I was growing up as a little boy in Northern Ireland, we used to go over to my grandmother's house, my Granny Moore, over in East Belfast.

She was under the shadow of the great ship building company, Harland and Wolff, where the Titanic was built. These were terraced homes, just rows and rows of brick houses. To the back of them were these small backyards that had walls right around them. It was a working class area and so you find invariably that they cemented pieces of broken glass along the tops of their walls. It was kind of a prevention from burglary or someone breaking into the home. I remember, as a boy, looking that the walls were white washed often, just to cover the dust and the dirt from the factories all around them. Often, you'd see a cat gingerly walking through the broken glass along the top of the wall. You know, soft paws, sharp glass, just picking it's way through, walking circumspectly. That's our word. That's what the cat was doing. That's what you and I ought to do.

As we go back into the workforce later today or tomorrow, as we go to school, as we engage our neighbors in leisure, put our best foot forward, be thoughtful and tactful. We looked at the who and the what and the when of that. Let's pick up where we left off, be tactful. We covered that. Walk in wisdom towards those who are outside. Now, here's the second thought. It's now time to take notes. Be

thoughtful. Be thoughtful. Walk in wisdom towards those who are outside redeeming the time. Our personal Evangelism ought to be marked by a certain urgency, by a certain sense of compulsion. We can't afford to allow the grass to grow under our feet. People are perishing. The prophetic clock is moving towards midnight. Hell is filling up. You only get so many opportunities to share the gospel. You can't waste them.

Redeem the time because Jesus says, doesn't he, in John 4:35, "Don't you know that the fields are already white on the harvest?" Implication, there are people in your office, there are neighbors on your street, my street, there are people that God's going to bring across our path who are ready to be saved, ready to be saved, ripe for the picking. We need to redeem the time. Because according to 2nd Corinthians six verse two, to reinforce this thought, now is the day of salvation. Now is the acceptable time. If people are ever going to get saved, it's now before judgment comes, before God closes the door on opportunity and turns the lock with an everlasting key. My friends, there is a window of time to see people saved for all of eternity and it's now. Let's unpack this little verse, redeeming the time.

The word "redeem" comes from the marketplace. Actually, the slave market. This was a word that was used in Paul's day of buying a slave and setting them free; redeeming them. By broadly speaking, it speaks of buying up, purchasing. Here's the point. What are we purchasing? Time. What are we buying up? Time. Time's a commodity and it must be bought up. Someone put it like this, "Time must be bought up like a bargain." My wife's always telling me about bargains, especially in the women's department or at Bath and Body or wherever. It's the bargain, you know? If I don't get so much of this, it will be gone. Yeah, like our money. I get it, bargain's are only there for a certain amount of time, buy them up. Buy the bargain. That's Paul here in Colossians.

Buy the commodity of time. Buy it up. Buy it up like a greedy shopper in the face of a bargain. In fact, the word "time" is interesting. It's not the Greek word Kronos, chronology, chronometer. It's not speaking about just linear time, you know? One o'clock, two o'clock, three o'clock, four o'clock. This is Kairos. It's a whole different Greek word and it connotes is significant time. It speaks about special periods of time within time. It can speak about opportunity. It can speak about a pivotal moment in history. Kairos, significant time, special time, and that's the word. Buy up the special time, which is the opportunity to share the gospel when it comes. The opportunity to witness will not always be there. But perhaps, your life is provoked in opportunity. That seems to be the implication, right? Walk with wisdom, conduct yourself smartly, and if you live for Jesus Christ that way, the chances are you're going to get an opportunity to share the gospel.

Your life may have provoked an opportunity, a person's own crisis or trauma may provoke an opportunity to bring the love of God and the hope of Jesus Christ. Some national crisis and historical moment cause people to look beyond themselves, beyond the material world, beyond the moment they're in, and grasp something for eternity. Something that's transcendent and fixed. When those moments come, and they won't always come, and they won't last forever, you and I need to take them because the people that we need in those moments will last forever; somewhere, heaven or hell. Paul is saying, "Be urgent. Be urgent. You don't sometimes get a second chance to share the gospel." Time is a non-renewable resource. I think we've all got moments in our lives where we've just missed the opportunity. Every time I go to LA Fitness, I'm aware of a moment, it happened a while ago, that still bothers me when I was in the locker room getting ready. There was a couple of guys talking. I'd talk to them a little bit.

They're not close, they're not friends, but I could have barged into the conversation probably if I wanted to. In the middle of it all, one of them talked about the after life. And kind of like, "Well, I hope God grades on the curve," or, "You know what? When we get there, we'll find out." I mean, talk about tee-ball. That was tee-ball. The ball was there, all I had to do was take a swing at it and I kept my cheeper closed. Every time I'm in there, I still remember that opportunity I missed. It hasn't come back that easily either. Life's like that. Buy it up. Buy it up. Don't squander it. Don't waste it. When God opens a door, go through it into the heart of the unbeliever. In fact, as I thought about open doors, I thought about a humorous incident a couple of years ago. I was pursuing a doctorate at TEDS in Chicago, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

I was taking a class with D.A. Carson, the premier New Testament scholar in America. He's a Canadian by birth, his dad actually came from Carrickfergus in Northern Ireland. We were out to lunch, it was a cold ... You know, I think it was a November or December class. We had gone to Panera Bread, we were coming back. I kind of lost my sense of where I was. We were in conversation. I realized this in the company of this great man. We were coming back into the building, I pushed the door open to let him come through. I mean, hey, I'm at the feet of Gamaliel here. This is Dr. D.A. Carson. He comes through the door and as he comes through the door he says, "Philip, it open automatically." And it's true. I remember that because of the cold air, the first two doors open automatically so that they're never left open. There's no point in running the heat inside the building if you leave open doors. You know, I felt like a klutz.

This brilliant man made me feel like that. Brilliant as he was, he was lacking in grace, mind you. But, that's beside the point. No point to expose me, sir. There you go. As I thought about that open door, you know, those are doors that open all the time. He's right. "Philip, those doors open by themselves. You don't need to hold them open. You don't need to do that." As I've thought about that, Evangelism isn't like those doors that just open all the time. But, there are times that God holds the door open and provides you with an opportunity that doesn't always come. At that point, you've got to go through that door and take that opportunity to share the gospel. In fact, in speaking about this text the last time one of the brothers here wrote me an email about this very thing. He was telling me a couple of weeks ago, he was in Walmart here in our community and he happened to notice a woman and it was very clear she was distressed.

They were in the same aisle and as he thought about that, he was pretty sure there's something going on in this woman's life, and he felt compassion for her, and he felt the stirring to say something to her, but he didn't take that opportunity. By this stage, she was moving on and he even thought about following her and he didn't think that was a good idea. Then, he felt bad. But, God in his goodness, 15 minutes later serendipitously they bumped into each other again in another aisle, 15 minutes later. He wasn't going to miss his opportunity this time. It was a set up. He believed in God's providence and he says, "Madame, can I just ask you, are you okay?" The lady shared that she was losing some of her friends who were dying. Life just seemed to be topsy turvy, upside down. She didn't know what to do. Darryl said, "Do you ever think that God might be trying to grab your attention?" To which she said, "Perhaps." He went on to witness and share the love of Christ, encourage her. Didn't see her come to Christ, but he prayed with her briefly, just standing in the aisle at Walmart.

That's what we're talking about. I mean, that was written all over her face. The spirit of God prompted him. God held the door open and he went through it. We need to be tactful and we need to be thoughtful, constantly looking to buy up God given opportunities to verbalize the gospel. Let's get to the last thought; be tasteful. Be tasteful. Verse six. There's a lot here, by the way. Let your speech always be

with grace, seasoned with salt, tasteful, that you may know how you ought to answer each one. Listen, we were singing earlier one of the songs by Shane and Shane from Psalm 34, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." Isn't he? Haven't we tasted and seen that the Lord is good? Our cup runs over. He has spread a table before us in the presence of our enemies. We're enjoying a banquet of God's faithfulness, and mercy, and love, and wisdom, and presence in our lives.

For those of us who have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, we want that for other people, right? Compassion and obedience drives us to share this with others. God is good. He has loved us in Christ. You need to put your faith in him. But, if we're going to tell people that God is good and we've tasted that fact to be true, we need to do that in a tasteful manner. Your presentation can't be ugly if you're trying to present the beauty of Jesus Christ, the glory of God's grace. We've got to be engaging, engrossing. When it comes to personal Evangelism, it's not just faithfulness to the message that matters, but a gracious representation of that message. That's Paul's point here. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you might know how you ought to answer each one. The message can be lost in translation. If our translation is awkward, or rude, or unbecoming, or unkind. No, we need God's grace. We need saving grace, we need strengthening grace, and we need speaking grace.

It's out of the heart the mouth speaks, right? If we're going to speak with grace, we're going to speak about the grace of God that has touched us. We're going to do that with grace. There's three things here. Three things; you need to be courteous, you need to be compelling, and you need to be competent. I'll explain that. Where's the first thought? You need to be courteous. That's the first phrase of verse six. "Let your speech always be with grace." The grace that has touched our lives will enable us to share the message of God's grace graciously. And look at what Paul says in Ephesians four verse 29, something very similar. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification that it may impart grace to the hearers." What do you want to impart? Grace. God's favor, God's kindness, the beauty of God's love. We're to be bold, but I'm not sure if it serves the purposes of God's kingdom to bark the gospel in people's face.

Now, remember we're talking about personal Evangelism, not public exposition. I can bark. You can't. You get the point. It doesn't serve the purposes of God to bark into your neighbor's face or the person at work. You can't bark in someone's face and expect their heart to turn to Jesus Christ. No, you've got to do it graciously, winsomely. Remember, guys, when we were in 2nd Timothy? 2nd Timothy chapter 2 verse 24, "And the servant of the Lord must not quarrel, but be gentle to all." I think it's making my point, able to teach, patient, in humility, correcting those who are in opposition if God, perhaps, would grant them repentance and bring them to a knowledge of the truth. We're to be courteous, we're to be kind, civility will help bring your neighbor's guard down. Because their defenses are up, naturally, in terms of Christ's claim on their life. The authority of God that's presented in the gospel. But, civility helps disarm them.

Do you remember that incident in the Garden of Gethsemane where Peter in an impulsive act draws his swords and cuts off the ear of that high priest's servant Malchus? Then, Jesus heals it, the guy's ear? I've often wondered, just metaphorically speaking, how many ears have I cut off, how many ears have you cut off, because we've barged into people's lives in an awkward manner, in a rude manner, shared the gospel in a loveless presentation? We've cut their ears off. Jesus is going 'round fixing ears that we've cut off so that they can hear the gospel one more time. I think that's what Paul's saying, "Hey, don't be lopping people's ears off. Gain a hearing. Win a hearing." Let's be honest, a brother pointed this out in first service. I thought it was helpful. I think as we find our feet in the faith, we're probably more likely to

do that early on as young Christians, you know? You just kind of go in where angels fear to tread, and you share the gospel, and you get into your mom's face and your dad.

You tell him he's going to hell if he doesn't repent. You know, "Turn and burn dad." Hold on a minute, looking back at that, that was awkward. You know, there's some room there. You've got to grow in your ability to be gracious. So I realize that we'll make some stumbles along the way, but at some point, we need to master this idea of being gracious, and patient, and kind, although firm, and bold, and urgent. That's a balance because Paul has just told us, "Hey, get busy. Buy up the opportunity." That's zeal. Often, we can become overly zealous and not be gracious. This is a dance. This is a balancing act. I was reading this week about the great lexicographer, Samuel Johnson, an English writer of the 18th century. He published the dictionary of the English language. He was a brilliant man. He had an encyclopedic mind, but he loved to argue.

He loved to win every debate he ever entered into. Someone said of him, "The most light and airy dispute with him was the dispute in the arena. He fought on every occasion as if his whole reputation depended upon the victory of the minute. He fought with all his weapons. If he was foiled in argument, he would recourse to abuse and rudeness. Someone else said of him, "There is no arguing with Johnson, for when his pistol misfires, he knocks you over the head with the butt of it." I wonder, haven't we all pistol whipped some unbeliever? In a way I don't think reflected the Lord Jesus. Just ... Let's get passionate about sharing the gospel, but we need to be courteous. Number two, we need to be compelling. Compelling. Look at Paul again, verse six, keep your Bible open, track along. "Let your speech always be with grace." That's courteous.

"Seasoned with salt." That's compelling. The word "season with salt" is a figure of speech. It was used in the ancient world of a sparkling conversation. You and I have said this of some people, "Hey, they're just phenomenal conversationalists. They make conversations interesting and engaging." That's our word, seasoned with salt. The point Paul is making here, if you're going to share the gospel, and you must, and when God gives you an opportunity to do it, and you answer everyone, do it in a way that compels interest. I mean, if you're going to talk about the fact that Jesus Christ was God, come in human flesh, how staggering is that thought? If you're going to talk about the miracle of the virgin birth, if you're going to talk about a sinless life, his miracles, if you're going to talk about the marvelous and miraculous unity of the Bible, if you're going to talk about the awesome reality of resurrection and Jesus' death defying act, you can't speak about that stuff.

Neither can I without some excitement, without a manner that engages interest. You've got to avoid insipid conversation, warm words, dull dialogue, tired phrases, Christianese, lazy speech. You're communicating the word, the eternal word. If you're going to communicate the eternal word, craft your words, pick your words, select your words, so that you can engage the unbeliever in a manner that's compelling. See, salt flavors things. I love salt. It's going to be the death of me. I love it. If you're ever going to get me to eat vegetables, you better give me a whole cellar of salt. I just put it over my fries, I put it over everything because it flavors the worst food imaginable. It certainly makes good food even better. It flavors. It flavors. In fact, I remember when I was dating June, her father would see me grab the salt and he said, "Son, you're going to kill yourself."

He said, "Salt's not good for you." Then, one day I was reading the gospel of Mark and there's a verse in Mark's gospel it says, "Salt is good," so I give him it right in his face one day, "Hey, Mark chapter whatever, salt is good." Here's the deal, it flavors, it flavors. Does the way you speak flavor the presentation of the gospel? Does it compel interest? Does it help magnify the magnificence of Jesus

Christ? Salt creates thirst, doesn't it? Does your speech create a thirst for Jesus? Do people salivate, spiritually speaking, when they hear your story and the gospel? They go, "Wow, I'm not sure I can believe that stuff about God, and human flesh, and virgin births, and miracles, but boy, you're making me think." Wasn't it Howard Hendricks of Dallas Theological Seminary, he used to say, "According to the old adage, you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink."

That's true, but you can feed him salt, which will make him drink. You can feed your neighbors salt that will make them hunger for the bread of life and the water of life. This makes me think a little bit because I've kind of heard this in some circles, certainly among some preachers at times, "You know what, the power resides in the gospel. We've got to be careful about, you know what, putting the emphasis on good communication and techniques. Ultimately, it will spill over into the wisdom of man. Ultimately, the media will overtake the message." I get that. That's a real danger, but I also think it's a cop out to say, "The power resides in the gospel so it doesn't really matter how I say it. Sometimes the plainer the better."

Well, I'm all for plain speech. That's a good thing, but I believe that the first part of that statement is right, but the second part of that statement is wrong. Of course the power resides in the gospel, but can't it be both and? Can't there be a theological tension where, of course, our trust is in the power of the gospel and the word we preach? But, as I read the biblical narratives and watch the biblical preachers from apostles and prophets, they certainly communicated creatively, appealingly. They did put an effort into how they said it. There was a poetic effort put into their preaching, to borrow a phrase from John Piper in his book, "Saying It Beautifully". I mean, if you take that idea to its logical conclusion, then all you need to do is get up and just quote scripture. If the power's in the scripture and it doesn't matter how you kind of say it, that doesn't square with the Bible's record of the preaching of itself.

The Bible's not boring. It shouldn't be preached in a boring manner. It was never preached in a boring manner by those whose lives we find in it. Listen to what Proverbs 25 in verse 11 says ... Proverbs 25 in verse 11, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver." What does that mean? A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. Saying the right thing at the right time is what we're after. That's what wisdom does. It says the right thing, in the right manner, at the right time. You know what it's like? It's like gold apples in settings of silver. It's like an ornament. That's an ornament, ladies. Where you go into someone's home in the ancient world and there's this beautiful ornament. There's apples that are made of gold and they're set on a plate of silver. A craftsman put that together. Gold apples, silver plates. It's like a word fitly spoken, it's been crafted. It's beautiful when it's presented.

You think the Bible's not concerned about presentation? What about Proverbs 16:23? Proverbs 16:23, got a similar thought. "The heart of the wise teaches his mouth and adds learning to his lips or adds persuasiveness to his lips." You go to Ecclesiastes 12 verses 9 to 11 and you'll find that the writer Solomon says that he wants his words to be like well driven nails. In fact, he says that he set out his Proverbs in order. He thought about presentation, logic, sequence, the best way to communicate. Do I need to go to the gospels and show you the parables of the Lord Jesus alone as a means of capturing people's imagination? Take the prodigal son story by itself. Jesus could have simply said, "You know what, folks? If you'll turn back to God, if you'll repent of your sin, God will accept you," because that's what he was teaching in the parable, but he didn't say that.

He said, "Can I tell you a story about a boy that ran away from home, took his inheritance early, turned his back on his father, went out into a far country, spent it all, ended up in a pig pen, came to nothing envied the servants in his father's house, ached to go home. Didn't think his father would ever accept

him. But do you know what? He got up, he went home, the father was there waiting on the porch to embrace the boy. Not only did he embrace him, not only did he forgive him, he told all the neighbors to arrive on Saturday afternoon. There's a big cookout, there's a party, because the son that was lost is coming home." Jesus says, "So it is when the sinner repents and the angels in heaven sing." But, he could have just said, "You know what? Repent and come home to God." But, that's not what he said. He seasoned his speech with salt. He told a story. He pictured it. He helped people grasp it.

In fact, if you even look at Paul in Colossians chapter two here, when Paul talks about the gospel in verses 6 through 23, read it later on today, you'll see he uses the image of a kidnapping. He talks about circumcision as death. He talks about baptism as burial. He talks about Christ as the head and the church as the body. He talks about our debt of sin like it's an IOU. He talks about nailing a charge sheet to a cross. He talks about how Jesus is leading us in triumphant processional like a Roman commander. He's using imaginative, pictorial, appealing, charming, engaging words to preach the gospel. I'm not ... I don't think Paul's saying, "Hey, you know what? If all you get to do is share the gospel bare bones, do it. But as opportunity arises, be courteous and be compelling."

Try and think about where you can connect with people and engage their thinking in the world they're in and communicate the everlasting gospel. In fact, I wrote down if you want to do better in that, master the English dictionary. Seriously, put a dictionary by your bedside and start reading it. Learn some new words so that you can craft a compelling presentation of the gospel. Listen to great communicators inside the church and outside the church. Even listen to secular communicators who are really good at communicating with people. Learn from them. Read well written books. The more you read, the better you'll speak. Think pictorially, think imaginatively. Let me tell you a story and we'll move to our last thought. Like this, it's about the migratory habits of certain birds in the United States. It was a scientific study by the department of interior.

What they did is they took a sample of these birds and they tagged them with metal strips. On the metal strips they had these abbreviated words, WASH, BIOL, SURV. It was short for Washington Biological Survey and they let the birds go. After a while, they decided to change the code because a farmer from Arkansas wrote to the department of the interior and here's what he said, "Dear sirs, I shot one of your birds. My wife followed the instructions attached. We washed it, we boiled it, and we served it. It was the worst thing we have ever eaten. Talk about a failure to communicate. You know, WASH, BIOL, SURV. Bad communication is a distasteful thing. Here's what I'd say before we get to our last thought. Listen, and hear me clearly, what we say is forever more important than how we say it.

The message is always more important than the medium. What we say is always more important than how we say it, but given the post modern culture that feels more than it thinks, given this visually oriented generation, how we say it has never been more important. Here's this ancient text of scripture speaking into our modern world and saying, "Hey, no dull presentations of the gospel. No lazy speech and tired language. Our creative God who has created us in his image has given an ability to speak creatively and compellingly. Do it for the gospel and for God's glory." Last point, you need to be competent. Look at verse six again. Last thought, "So that you might know how you ought to answer each one." Watch where he has gone, let's pray for gospel opportunities and as you live wisely and compellingly and authentically for Jesus Christ in the outside world, chances are your life is going to provoke a question.

The crisis in another person like that lady in Walmart is going to provoke an opportunity. A world or national crisis is going to cause people to think spiritually in ways they have never done and God has just

opened you a door to speak the gospel. Now, do it courteously, do it compellingly, and do it competently. You better have an answer to the question your life has provoked. That's competence and ability to get the job done. We need to be ready for that moment. We need to be prepared. You need to be preparing yourself for that. You might say, "Pastor, I'm not good at that." Well, that's okay. None of us were ever good at it, but you can become good at it. You can do better. You can grow. You can go to Kindred University and get trained in theology and the gospel and the word of God.

You can enroll with Living Waters in one of Mark Spence's apologetic courses and learn how to defend your faith in the public square regarding the issues of the day. To have some basic answer for, "Why do you believe the Bible?" Some basic answer for, "Why do you believe Jesus is the only way to heaven?" Some basic answer for, "Well, how do you explain that a God of love would wipe out certain cultures in the Old Testament?" On and on these questions go. I realize Paul, I don't think, is saying here that you and I need to have a perfect answer for every question that anybody might be able to ask us across a lifetime. Do you know how many times I've said to people, "I don't know the answer to that, but I'm going to get you one." Probably more than you'd realize because we're all growing. But, there needs to be a competency, some basic ability to defend your faith, and commend your faith, and that's on you.

Paul is speaking to the Colossians and he says, "Hey, be wise. Look for open doors. When the open doors come, you'd better be able to give an answer to everyone that asks." Could you? Isn't that what Peter says the same thing? 1st Peter 3:15, "But sanctify the Lord God in your heart and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who ask you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." Sounds very like what Paul is saying in Colossians four verses five, "Be ready. Be prepared to give a defense or give a reason." That's a lawyer's word. The Greek word there speaks of someone defending someone in a courtroom. It's a lawyers brief. I'll tell you what, when you go into a court with a lawyer, you don't want some guy that doesn't, or a lady that doesn't know their stuff, cause in some cases your life is on the line. I want the lawyer, an advocate, to be compelling, logical, got the facts down, the issues of the case, and to answer the questions that's in the jury's mind or the judge's thoughts.

That's our word. You need a Bible brief. You need to have some brief ready. Those are the questions of the day, "Well, why do you believe the Bible? You believe in six day creation? Science shoots that down, doesn't it? Jesus is the only way? Wasn't Jesus just a man?" On and on it goes. Again, those are great questions that men have studied across a lifetime, but there are some good answers to that that you can learn yourself. Get over and learn. Open your Bible, read books, enroll in classes, be ready to give a reason for the hope that lies in you when you're asked. The Evangelistic encounter must not only be opportune in regard to time, it must be appropriate in terms of engagement. There are many people who don't know the faith, right? We need to reach them. They need people who know the faith to tell them what they don't know. But, here's the sad fact, it's a challenge this morning.

Too often, people who don't know the faith meet Christians who don't know their faith, and they're simply a dry well, and there's nothing to draw from, and an opportunity is missed, and the impact of the church is lessened because we're not doing our jobs to speak courteously, compellingly, and competently about the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to aspire to be like Philip in Acts 8 who's presented with an opportunity. He meets a man and he embraces that opportunity. He redeems the time, he meets a man, Ethiopian Eunuch. He's reading something, he doesn't understand what he's reading. Philip asks, "What are you reading?" He says, "I'm reading some guy called Isaiah." "Where are you in the prophecy of Isaiah?" "Like about Isaiah 53." Philip goes, "Hey, let me tell you what that's about. Let me tell you about who was wounded for your transgressions and bruised for your iniquities," and he preaches Jesus then.

The man gets saved and gets baptized. He was ready to embrace the opportunity. He had an answer for the man that asked. Again, we'll grow in that, but we need to grow in that. We mustn't be like, as I close, the Irish man who John Philips talks about in his commentary in Colossians. He said that this Irish man was asked what he believed and he said to this man that asked what he believed. He says, "Well, I believe what the church believes." The man said, "Well, what does your church believe?" "Well, the church believes what I believe." To which the man said, "Well, what do you both believe?" He says, "We both believe the same thing." Well, he was answering the questions, but not answering the questions because he didn't know how to answer the questions.

Lord, help us to answer the questions of our day. Help us to seek to master the scriptures, have a working knowledge of our Bibles so that we're not going to be dumbstruck when we're asked about the authority of scripture, the person of Jesus Christ, the claims of God. Lord, we want to have meaningful conversations with people every day. We believe, and Paul seems to hint, that those opportunities will come. They must be bought up like a bargain. When the opportunity's there, provoked by our lives and our smart living, help us to speak courteously and reflect the grace of our Lord Jesus. Help us to speak compellingly. Help us know what to say, how to say it, and to say it in a manner that's captivating. Help us to be competent. Help us to be good ambassadors for Jesus Christ, good representatives of the Master.

Lord, forgive us for those times, as I've expressed even in my own life when you teed the ball up and I didn't even take a swing. We regret to our eternal shame those times where we have kept our mouths closed. Forgive us, enable us to do better, like Jim Henry, help us to make it our goal each and every day to have a meaningful conversation with someone without Jesus Christ about Jesus Christ. We thank you that Colossians four, five, and six has told us how to do it. We pray this in Jesus name, amen.