



Moving People Toward Christ – Part 2, Evangelism

Colossians 4:2-6; 1 Peter 3:15

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Our Scripture today is from Colossians 4:2-6. Let's hear God's Word together:

² *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.*

³ *At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—* ⁴ *that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.* ⁵ *Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.* ⁶ *Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*

Father, I pray that my speech now would be gracious. Equip us to answer each person. We pray that You would use this sermon to bless, direct and empower us. In Christ's name. Amen.

This summer we're looking at ways to encourage people to take a big step toward Jesus Christ. That's the game changer. Christ died and rose again, and if you're a believer, He is now your Lord. There's a sign over your heart that says, "Under new ownership." But there's still renovation taking place while God is working in us to direct our lives. We're in His Kingdom, and while it's invisible to the world, for us it is real. We are called to mature in our faith, but we're also called to help others. We're to help other Christians grow in their faith and we're to help non-believers find Christ.

Last week we discussed how to love those who are on the side of the road and needing help through the story of the Good Samaritan. Loving our neighbor requires both action and words. Last week we looked at the action part; today we'll talk about the speaking part—sharing our faith. How do we effectively witness to a non-Christian world? What does Colossians tell us about loving both God and our neighbor?

Paul opens his letter by describing Christ's uniqueness and preeminence. He says that believers have been united with Him in His life, death and resurrection. So our world now should be entirely for Him. We don't come to church for ourselves; we come to worship our Lord, Who is now the preeminent One, the center of our being. He has captured our hearts. Paul then moves to consider our obligations toward our Lord. What does it mean to follow Him? We

aren't in heaven yet. We still have sins to repent of us and areas in which we need to grow. In Colossians 3 he talks about putting off our sin and putting on the qualities of Christ.

Later in that chapter Paul begins to speak of our ministry to others: husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves—and in the verses we read, including outsiders: “*Walk in wisdom toward outsiders.*” So that’s what we’ll be thinking about today: how to relate to outsiders, those who are not in our church, who may never come into our church or any church. Just as walking into a casino might be weird to you, so walking into a church seems weird to them. So we’re called to go and love those who are outside our circles.

This is something we really can’t do in our own strength. Paul emphasizes that everything we do for the Lord is done through Him. Husbands are to love their wives “in the Lord.” Wives are to submit “in the Lord.” Everything is done to please Him, or done in a way that is fitting toward Him. We have a Master in heaven Whom we are to serve and please.

Therefore we need to realize that evangelism is not up to us or for us. We are to do it in Him and for Him. We don’t reach others through feeling guilty, but instead we are equipped by Him and He is speaking through us. It’s not our strength but His. Our testimony to a lost world comes out of our relationship with Christ.

Talking to God about people

In the first part of Colossian 4:2-4, we’re talking to God about other people. Paul begins with an emphasis on prayer:

*Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.
At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for
the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in
prison—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.*

What’s the connection between prayer and evangelism? Think about it. The more time you spend with God, the more you’ll want to talk about Him. The more you’re enjoying God, the more you’re praising Him, the more you’re looking to Him, it will then be easier to speak of Him because He’s on your heart and mind. If you love God and are delighting in and depending on Him, you’ll want to help others depend on Him as well. So praying naturally fits with evangelism. If you’re slow to speak to others about Christ, go deeper and ask yourself: “How is my heart with the Lord?”

In addition, prayer has real power. If you were just reading through Colossians, what would you conclude about those who are outside of Christ? Where are they? They’re in a domain of darkness and alienated from God. They’re even hostile toward Him. They won’t be saved by

our simple witness alone. To free them from the darkness requires spiritual warfare, spiritual power. Only God's Spirit can apply His Word in this kind of battle. So we must pray that God Himself will rescue people by His mercy.

The power of prayer is needed because people are enslaved to sin. They are captives of the enemy and are blind to the things of God. Earlier in Colossians 2, Paul explained that people aren't blank slates, just waiting for someone to tell them about Jesus. No, their slates are full—but they're full of wrong ideas. Worse even than fake news is a false gospel, and that's what has been written on their slates.

So we must pray that Christ will take back the territory that the enemy controls. We know that He has triumphed over demons and we want to see that become a reality in specific lives. "May he believe. May she repent. Lord, take over their lives. Work Your Kingdom into the lives of those who are now outside."

How do we pray effectively? In verse two, Paul says we should pray steadfastly. We're to devote ourselves to this kind of prayer, with persistence and endurance. Remember, Jesus Himself taught us always to pray and never give up. Prayer doesn't require a special language. We don't need to sound like Shakespeare when we pray. Prayer is simply a normal conversation with God. Remember how Abraham spoke with the angel of the Lord about Sodom and Gomorrah? That was just a conversation—speaking and waiting for God's response.

Second, Paul says our prayers should include being watchful. We must be alert, vigilant and attentive. If you're a Christian, you've been raised up with Christ and seated with Him in heavenly places. Yet you see a lot of suffering and unbelief in this world. Prayer is the way to connect these two worlds. You bring people to the Lord. "Lord, he's really hurting. She is so confused. Would You clear this up please?" That's how God's Kingdom is connected with what you see. If you're watchful and attentive, and if you know God's love and power, you will instinctively connect His care and mercy with the needs you see around you.

Peter tells us in 1 Peter 5:8, "*Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*" If we are relaxed and not praying, we forget that Satan is looking for people to devour. Through prayer we're entreating the Holy Spirit to protect us and intervene in a bad situation. As you pray, quote to God the truth about Who He is and what He has promised to do, asking for specific wisdom on how to face the challenges in our lives.

Prayer is being steadfastly devoted; it is being watchful, and it is to be combined with thanksgiving. The Bible doesn't prescribe a specific body posture for prayer. You can be sitting, standing, in the shower, kneeling beside your bed, lying down, or even driving your car (with

your eyes open). You can pray any time, in any place, using any posture. But your heart does need to have the right posture, that of thankfulness. You must be trusting the Lord, believing in His power and faithfulness, thanking Him for Who He is.

This posture fights off our tendency toward selfishness. When we're thanking God, our prayers are flavored with Him rather than ourselves. We're thinking about what He's already done in Christ, what He means to us and to our families, and His power in this world. That's the way we draw near to the throne of grace, focusing on how great God is, in times when we need His help. God already knows what we need before we ask, so it's good to thank Him even before we see His answers.

Prayer should be steadfast, vigilant, with thanksgiving—but it also includes asking. Paul specifically tells the Colossians, *“Pray for us, that God may open to us a door for the word.”* Prayer means bringing our requests to God. John Newton says it well:

Thou art coming to a King;
Large petitions with thee bring.
For His grace and power are such
None can ever ask too much
None can ever ask too much.

Paul is praying for the gospel to go forth. We too have global partners that we pray for. Or when you're driving by a local church, pray for the pastors of that church. “Let the Word go forth there clearly and powerfully. May people truly hear the gospel.” We can lift up our other churches in our area, asking God to spread His Word. Paul is asking that the mystery of Christ would be made known. People don't know about Christ or the story of salvation unfolded in the Bible. They don't know what went wrong with the world, how it has been made right, and what's going to happen in the end.

If you're a Christian, you have the answers to those questions—answers that are found in Christ. We need to share what we know, telling people of the mystery of Christ, how He dwells in us, “the hope of glory.” Tell them how everyone, Jew and Gentile alike, are welcomed into His Kingdom. Such good news we have to share! We get to talk about Jesus. And Paul is praying that this good news will go out into all the world.

We read in Acts 16 that Paul was preaching in a certain place when a woman named Lydia, who sold purple cloth, heard him preaching. It says the Lord opened her heart to believe in Christ. That's what we are praying for, that God would open hearts. We can pray for others as they go into conversations with non-believers. We might pray, “Lord, bless my wife as she speaks with this person. Give her the words to say. Open the eyes of her friend and let her see how great

You are. This is a spiritual battle and she won't believe unless You do something. Be merciful to my wife and use her in this conversation.”

Normal, ordinary Christianity includes praying for each other like this. And when someone shows an interest in God's truth, we need to equip each other to know how to respond to their questions. Witnessing happens best when the community works together. In verse three, Paul asks that God would open a door for the gospel to go out. Think about that metaphor and think about how well God answered that prayer. If you know the gospel today, most likely it came to you through Paul and the words the Holy Spirit inspired him to write.

If Paul himself is asking for clarity, we should definitely be asking for it! This guy wrote 13 New Testament letters. Why is he asking for clarity about the gospel? If anyone knows the gospel, the Apostle Paul—inspired by the Holy Spirit—should know the gospel. I think one thing that's happening here is that everywhere Paul goes, he wants the gospel to be personal to every person. And because people are so different, he needed clarity. Just like a tailor-made suit fits better than the frumpy feel of a store-bought suit, that's how Paul viewed his gospel preaching. It's one gospel, but he wanted it to fit every person, so they would walk away thinking, “That gospel is for me.”

Each situation calls for specific clarity from God:

- Suppose you're talking to someone from an honor/shame culture. Perhaps the part of the gospel that would mean the most is how Christ removes shame and restores honor.
- Someone from an African background where there is a lot of spiritual warfare might appreciate knowing of the victory of Christ in His defeat of Satan through the cross and resurrection.
- Or perhaps the person feels dirty from their own sin or violated by someone else's sin against them. They might be touched most by the cleansing nature of the gospel.
- Perhaps this person is feeling alienated and distant from God. In that case, they need to see the hope of the gospel that will adopt them into a family with God as their Father.
- Another person might feel enslaved by their sin, thinking they can never escape certain emotions or addictive habits. For them, the gospel carries power through new birth, and the Lordship of Christ can free them from their former enslavement.

Wow! The gospel is a diamond with many beautiful facets, and we can show the different facets depending on the need of the person to whom we're speaking. We should listen to their questions, then make clear that the gospel is the answer for which they're searching. That makes God personal to them. He creates each of us uniquely and He is able to relate to us personally.

That's what Paul is praying for here. Even though some doors may be shut and even locked, God can open them. This really removes the pressure. It's amazing that in spite of our many botched testimonies, God is still able to work through us. He uses broken people with broken words. Our meager attempts to communicate can still be powerful if He is in them.

Charles Spurgeon loved telling the story of his conversion, and he records that he told it at least 280 times over the course of his ministry. When he was 15 years old he was walking somewhere in England on a snowy day and got sidetracked on Artillery Street. Seeking shelter, he stepped into a Primitive Methodist chapel. The pastor wasn't there, but there was a layman in the pulpit. Spurgeon could tell the man had no idea what he was doing. But he read a verse—Isaiah 45:22—in which the Lord says, “Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth. For I am God, and there is no other.” The man didn't know what to say about the text, so he just kept repeating it. Here's how Spurgeon described it:

He had not much to say, thank God. For that compelled him to keep on repeating his text. There was nothing needed—by me, at any rate—except his text. Then stopping, he pointed to where I was sitting under the gallery, and he said, “That young man there looks very miserable.” And he shouted, as only a Primitive Methodist can do, “Look! Look, young man. Look. Look now!” Then I had this vision. Not a vision to my eyes, but to my heart. I saw what a Savior Christ was. Now I can never tell you how it was, but no sooner I saw Whom I was to believe than I also understood what it was to believe, and I did at that moment believe in my Savior.

He was saved through this man yelling at him. I love it. God's going to do the work. He is the One Who will open the doors, so you can just be your awkward, normal self. Just step in there and talk, making much of Christ. It's about Jesus. That's what we're praying for—taking the opportunity to make much of Him.

But there's a cost to following Christ. Remember where Paul is writing from. He's praying that God would open a door to declare this mystery, “*on account of which I am in prison.*” Sharing the gospel comes at a cost. We must be ready and willing to pay a price. But see how even from prison Paul still wanted the gospel to be spread. He didn't turn inward or feel sorry for himself. His heart and prayers were focused outward. This is a helpful insight for us, to realize that in some of our weakest moments God is still able to spread the gospel.

As many of you know, this week marked the 50th year since Joni Eareckson Tada had a diving accident. For 50 years she has been a quadriplegic. But those of you who know about her ministry “Joni and Friends” would agree that it has had a profound impact worldwide. God has

used this woman, imprisoned in a weak body, in a tremendous ministry of the gospel to poor and disabled outsiders. We too must be willing to suffer for the gospel, because our suffering or our weakness may be the very thing God can most use.

Talking to people about God

In addition to Paul calling us to talk to God about people, he also calls us to talk to people about God whenever the opportunity comes. We see this in verses five and six:

*Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.
Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you
may know how you ought to answer each person.*

The content of the gospel matters, but so does the manner in which we express it. Paul weaves together both life—walking in wisdom—and speech. They must go together. When we explain Christ’s transforming grace to someone, and when they also see us living it out in the transformation of our own lives, that becomes the true apologetic. It’s one thing to hear the gospel, but it’s a whole other thing to see it demonstrated in someone’s life. Others will watch to see if we’re humble, if we’re willing to apologize, if we are spending time with God ourselves. This is why Paul exhorts us both to walk in wisdom and to have gracious speech.

Let’s apply these two categories—walking and speaking—to how we present ourselves. Are we humble? Are our teachings orthodox? Are we bold to speak of Christ? If we’re humble, people enjoy being around us. Humble people who walk in wisdom are fun to be with, because they enjoy others. They believe in God’s common grace. God has created every human being, and every one suffers and is fallen. No matter where we go, there will always be people who are outside the Kingdom—and that’s a good thing.

These are people whom God has made and for this reason there is good in them. For example, my neighbor is extremely hospitable, so I tell him how he teaches me hospitality. You can find some good in anyone, because of God’s common grace. But God also has special saving grace that comes to those who know and follow Him. So in our humility and enjoyment of any sort of person, we should be willing to speak of what God has given us.

So a person might say to you, “Oh, yeah. All religions basically teach the same thing.” As a Christian, you can begin to interact with that thought. Or perhaps a neighbor brings up the question of morals, so you can introduce the worldview that represents Christian orthodoxy. You may be a person who has deep, orthodox Scriptural convictions—the kind of thing you might even die for—so lovingly and humbly converse with non-Christians concerning their thoughts as

well. Humility and orthodoxy are a great pair. This is what we should pray for: speaking the truth in love.

Proverbs 11:30 says, *“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and whoever wins souls is wise.”* Maybe Paul had this proverb in mind when he spoke of walking in wisdom with outsiders, *“making the best use of the time.”* What does he mean by that? No one is going to follow Jesus unless you spend time with them. Make the best use of a conversation. Put it in your schedule. Allow time for people. Make it part of your life. Snatch up every opportunity and exhaust every possibility when you’re with non-Christians.

Try to double-dip. If you’re caring for your kids, interact with their non-Christian friends. Do both. Include non-Christian people in your activities. Part of our calling is to walk in wisdom with outsiders and make the most of every opportunity. We should be praying about each day in this way: “Lord, may I make the most of my time today for people who don’t know You.”

When these opportunities come, you may think to yourself, “Man, I’m so not the evangelist. I stink at this. I don’t have the gift.” Yes, not everyone is going to be like Paul, the evangelist and church planter. We get that. But Paul is writing to the church. So these are things that apply to us. We’re still supposed to win non-Christians to Christ. So for you, your approach might be very indirect or responsive. Your evangelism could be quite different from Paul’s.

Here’s a goal that should apply to every Christian: ordinary life with gospel intentionality. Let’s take shopping. How do you shop with gospel intentionality? Or how do you go to L.A. Fitness with gospel intentionality? You’re in an interview for a job. You’re still a Christian in that interview. Who knows what God might do in that person who’s interviewing you. My wife reminded me the other day, “God is doing millions of things in people lives, and I might only see one of them, but that person is probably more interested in Jesus than I know. So I’m going to speak about Him, because God might be working behind the scenes to direct their interest toward Himself.”

There’s a lady who worked as a midwife in the villages of north Africa. She had an expression that guided her: “I always have a parable up my sleeve.” And she did. She would tell stories about Jesus as she worked in these villages. One time she was returning to a certain village and someone said to her, “You know that story you told about the son who ran away and then came home, and the father received him back? Do you have a book where that story came from?” So she gave them a New Testament. She had opened the door and later that family was interested in knowing more. That’s what ordinary life with gospel intentionality looks like. So put some stories up your sleeve too.

Our everyday speech can point to greater realities. Our speech should be gracious and loving, but also “salty.” We don’t need to please people with sugar, just being agreeable with everyone and everyone’s opinion. That’s not being true to our Christian faith. We are to be salty. Salt preserves and flavors things. We are to speak wisely in the context. Our country is currently very heated and divided. There’s a lot of unbelief and many people hold very negative, hostile positions toward Christianity. The salty wisdom we have might cause them to take a small step in the right direction, which is part of what we’re called to do.

So think about how to naturally talk about Christ. Think about how to be a Christian as a normal person who has been saved by grace and who loves the Lord. If you don’t share your faith with your friends—if you’re intimidated by that—go deeper into Who Jesus is. Develop deeper and stronger convictions about the gospel. But know too that following Jesus involves serving others, sometimes at a cost. Count that cost. It’s worth it. They need help too. We’re called to rescue them. If you struggle with feeling ashamed, just keep at it and go deeper into Jesus.

Finally, Paul ends with this: *“Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”* Each person. Peter says this in 1 Peter 3:15: *“In your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.”* We need to honor Christ in our hearts as holy—the vertical dimension. But we are also to be prepared horizontally—with gentleness and respect—to give an answer to anyone who asks about our hope.

When people are with us, they should feel, “He makes this so personal. She relates this to my life so well. She’s listening to me. She actually follows up with what I said. He cares.” Your answers should be directed to a specific person and their specific questions. So you share, but you also wait for some kind of response. If the person isn’t asking any questions, pray that God would work in their hearts to bring them to ask questions.

We should especially be looking for people who are asking questions. Even if it takes a thousand conversations to find that one person who has real questions, go for it. Talk to people. Find someone in whom God is really working and who has some questions, who wants to know more about God. That’s our expectation. Be hopeful.

If you were to ask what effective evangelism is, I would say it includes three strands that are woven together like a rope:

- Building relationships.
- Being clear about the gospel.
- Inviting them into community.

Notice how Paul in Colossians is not really talking to individuals, but to a church. Of course, we can apply these ideas practically as individuals, but in a sense he's calling the church to consider these things as a group. He is expecting Christians to evangelize together. After all, Jesus sent His disciples out two by two.

So we need to be thinking about how we too should implement this passage as a church family, in our small groups or as friends. We can do this together. While we may be speaking only to one individual, our desire is for their faith to multiply until their whole family comes to Christ. We want their children and relatives to be impacted as well. We want everyone who comes to faith to also share their faith with others. This is the beauty of the gospel. Think about what it took for Jesus to start with 12 disciples and get to where we are today. It was people sharing their faith with people who then shared their faith.

What motivates all of this? It's the gospel itself. This is profound. On one hand, the gospel is the most exclusive message in the whole world. Christ is the only way. There is salvation in no one else. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." So if a person does not have a relationship with Christ through faith, they are not going to heaven. They will not have eternal life. There is only one way, only one Savior. So we as Christians have the most exclusive message on the planet.

Yet, the gospel is also the most inclusive and welcoming message. Jesus says all can come—Jew or Gentile, every race, every person. Their past doesn't matter. Everyone is welcome to come to Him, because the invitation is based on His grace, not on their works. Isn't that an interesting dynamic—to have the most exclusive message with the most inclusive invitation? No religion offers anything like this.

Christianity started in Israel, had a heyday in Europe, then in North America—but today the largest population of Christians is globally south and east of us. There are more Christians in Africa than here. God has no favorites. He's moving around the world—into new families, new people groups, new languages, new nations. He wants every tribe, tongue, people and nation in His Kingdom. This should propel us, as we see what God is doing for everyone. But it's always through Christ.

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