

## Speaking of Christ in the World

Colossians 4:2-6

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Why are we here? I don't just mean in this room this morning, but why are we still here on earth? Why does God leave us here? When you trust Jesus Christ as your Savior, why does God not just transport you immediately to heaven? He has a mission for us here on earth.

Our passage today calls our attention to two crucial ways we carry out Christ's mission, areas of near universal failure for most Christians: evangelism and prayer. Few believers would say their prayer life is awesome. If you want to ensure a small crowd, call a prayer meeting. Prayer is hard and we fail, yet we know it is vital to Christ's mission. Few believers would say they are great at evangelism. If you want a smaller crowd, call an evangelism training session. Evangelism is scary and we fail, yet we know it is vital to Christ's mission.

In Colossians chapter 4 the text links prayer with evangelism. Brace yourself for a challenge from God today. We are nearing the end of our fall study: *Experiencing Christ, a journey through Colossians*. The theme of Colossians is the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ in the universe, and in our lives. God is changing us. I've been out to the Experiencing Christ blog on our web site, [www.mcfbc.org](http://www.mcfbc.org) and read your stories. Here's one.

"I did it I joined a small group Bible study and am excited to jump in. It's not the Experiencing Christ small groups but I joined. Being new to the area has given me great pause in becoming a part of McFBC as opposed to just a Sunday morning attendee. I miss my old home church greatly and didn't want to just jump from one church to the next, but now I know that's exactly what's called for. Celebrating where I am as opposed to mourning where I was. I miss it but need to connect here, so look for me at the next connection 101 class, I just may be sitting next to you."

A second one on the other hand said, "Anonymous said... I'm saddened that I chose not to participate in a small group to do this study, Of course there is always next time and I did purchase the book so I can go at it alone. This is a life lesson for me to not hesitate due to fear, but to jump in and enjoy where

ever Christ is concerned. I'm grateful for the blog, what a genius way to capture thoughts and ideas.”

I have received your emails and looked into your eyes after services as you tell me how God is healing you and growing you. Life Group leaders have told me about people coming to Christ for the first time, about baptisms, about marriages healed, about people out of church for years coming back. God is at work.

We are a high challenge church. We are not interested in being some happy, smiley Suburban mega-mall church of superficial religiosity. We believe Jesus Christ is the son of God, died on the cross and rose again. Really. Therefore all of life is for Jesus. He is changing us. Then He calls us to change the world in His power. Christ calls people to follow Him in the fullest sense. Following Jesus is not part of your life, but all of your life. Pray that today God will change you.

The Bible gives us God’s direction for life. Open your Bibles to the book of Colossians. Take a look at chapter one. As we come to the end of the book let me show you how it all comes together. Paul starts with thankful prayer in chapter one verse 3, now in chapter 4 he calls them to be thankful in prayer. Paul shared about his ministry and the power of the Gospel, now he calls them to pray as he prays and to work as he works for Christ.

Please stand for the reading of God’s word. Turn to Colossians chapter 4 and verse 2. These five verses connect us to our mission outside of ourselves. The words are just as fresh and real for us today as they were to the Colossians years ago. Listen to God’s words as if they were written to you personally, because they were.

*<sup>2</sup> Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. <sup>5</sup> Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. <sup>6</sup> Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

The text falls into two major sections: we are to talk to God about people; and talk to people about God. Essentially Paul says: prayerfully seize opportunities to wisely show and share the Gospel.

## **Talk to God about people**

The Bible assumes we are praying. The text addresses the character and content of our prayers. We must talk to God about people. We only move the mission forward on our knees. That is why McKinney Fellowship is based on prayer. From our earliest days we began in prayer; the original 100 founding people committed to 300 days of intentional prayer. Today we have a prayer ministry with multiple times for prayer and ways to share requests. But the primary place for prayer is our Life Groups, small Bible study groups in homes. That is where you can know people well enough to know what to pray for. I urge you to take time in your Life Groups to pray in the way Paul describes for us in these verses, with this character and this content. He shares how we should pray and for what we should pray. Consider the character of our prayers.

### **Character of our prayers**

Three traits should characterize our prayer. Our prayers should be PAT, not point after touchdown, but persistent, alert and thankful.

### **Persistent**

First our prayer should be persistent. The Bible says, “*Devote yourselves to prayer.*” If we expect our prayer life to have significant effects in our lives and in our world, it cannot be haphazard, but must be habitual. We cannot fall back on prayer only when we think we need it; we must devote ourselves to it. Prayer must become a habit, not an exception. For Paul prayer was crucial to the mission. Dare churches today take prayer any less seriously? Dare you?

For whom have you been praying for a long time that they would trust in Jesus Christ? Is there anyone you have given up on because it seemed like they were too hard? They would never come to Jesus. Paul says be devoted to prayer. Don't give up. Picture that person in your mind right now. If you will agree to pray for them for the rest of this year, write their name on your Care Card. I will personally join you to pray for every person by name between now and the end of the year. I have prayed for years for my younger brother. I still do, every week. I have prayed for years for my oldest son, Bart, that he will trust in Christ.

Who have you nearly given up on? Who have you been praying to trust in Christ for years? Write their name on your Care Card. I will pray for them. Then let me know how God works in their life. In addition to persistence, our prayers should be characterized by alertness.

## **Alert**

The text says we must be alert or watchful, but watchful for what? The word for “watchful” is drawn from the imagery of guard duty. Paul may have been thinking about the disciples with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when He asked them to watch and pray, but they fell asleep. We must be awake, alert in prayer. This same image of alertness is used in the New Testament for watching for Jesus’ return. The time is short. We do not know how many days we have left, so we must pray to make the most of every opportunity.

Raise your hand if you have ever fallen asleep or been distracted in prayer. That should be everyone who prays! So how can we counter our tendency to fall asleep and get distracted in prayer? Try picturing the person you are praying for. See them in your mind’s eye. Look at them as you pray for them. Picture the fulfillment of your prayer. As you pray imagine that person trusting in Christ. It helps me to write or type my prayers. Some people need to move when they pray. Pray as you take a walk, pray as you do mindless chores, pray as you drive. To make our PAT, we must add to persist and alert, the character of T,

## **Thankful**

Thankfulness is a major theme in Colossians. When you realize what God shows us in Colossians about who Christ is and what He has done for us, how can you not be thankful? Paul wrote Colossians from a Roman prison cell. And He was thankful even in that cell. Write down one thing you are thankful for on your Care Card. So often we use that Card for requests and that is proper, but you can also use the Card for prayers of thanks. Our staff would love to thank God with you. What is one thing you are thankful for?

Our prayers should be PAT, characterized by persistence, alertness and thankfulness. In your Life Groups, I encourage you to consider these characteristics in your prayer times. From how we should pray, Paul turns to for what we should pray, from the character of our prayers to the content of our prayers.

## **Content of our prayers**

What should be the content of our prayers? Throughout the Bible prayers are offered for many things, but in this text Paul focuses us on the mission. He

does not ask the believers to pray for his prison doors to open, but for doors to open for the Gospel. He asks for prayer for

### **Opportunities**

Paul writes in verse 3, .<sup>3</sup> *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.* His heart is to proclaim or speak the mystery of Christ. What is that? Look back to chapter 1 verses 26 and 27 and then chapter 2 verse 2. The mystery of Christ is God's open secret that the salvation of whole world comes through Christ. The mystery is Christ Himself—the wide implications of who He is and what He has achieved. Paul wanted people to know that Christ is the supreme and sufficient Savior. Today, I want you to know that. If you have never trusted in Jesus Christ, come to Him today. He offers to be your Savior. Trust in Him today. You can indicate your decision on the Care Card.

Far beyond his own personal peace and well-being, Paul is concerned about the advance of the Gospel. He sees all of life through this filter. Paul asks the believers to pray for open doors. Do you do that?

A few years ago, I came across this truth and made a deliberate change in my life. I realized that many days the mission was not even on my mind. I went through the motions of my day without ever even thinking about talking to someone about Jesus. This was a terrible moment of guilt for me. I asked myself: Do I even love lost people? Do I have Jesus' heart to share the message of hope? Sadly I faced the truth that I was not anything like Jesus in this area of my life. How could I go through an entire day or week without even thinking about sharing the message of Jesus' love? So I made a change.

I started praying a simple prayer every morning: “Dear God, I ask you to open doors for Your message so that I can share about Jesus with someone today.” Many days I wondered in prayer what opportunity God might give me that day. It becomes a sense of adventure. I get excited with anticipation as I imagine how God might use me today. When I'm really living this way, I wonder if the next person I encounter is the opportunity God is providing. When that person starts confiding their personal situation, maybe God is giving me opportunity to share the message of peace and healing. When I “happen” to sit next to a certain person or stand next to a person in line and we strike up a conversation, has God placed them next to me in answer to my prayer?

I am embarrassed to admit that I have really slipped in praying that daily prayer for open doors. God reconvicted me. So this week, I have started back praying every day for God to open doors of opportunity to influence someone with the truth of Jesus Christ. I've had some success and some failure. I was alert to opportunities playing racquetball, but then blew it when I went to vote. The line was long so I was frustrated rather than seeing the opportunity to talk with the people behind me and in front of me. Paul tells us to pray for open doors. Then Paul gives the second request. We should pray for

### **Clarity**

Pray for God to give you the words to say. The Spirit of God will do this if you ask. At Pentecost the Spirit entered our world filling the believers with boldness and wisdom. When they were scared, God gave Peter and Stephen amazing words to preach. If you are stumbling over what to say, let me ask you, have you prayed about it? We have not because we ask not. Ask God to enable you to proclaim the message clearly, to make it plain.

Paul adds, "as I should." He was compelled to preach the Gospel because he understood the eternal stakes and our divine calling. Pray for clarity. You might add that request to your daily prayer for opportunities. "God give me clarity when you provide the opportunity. Lord, open doors and then empower me to walk through them."

For the rest of this year, I challenge you to join me in praying every day that God will give you an opportunity to show and share His love. I have a sample prayer on the back of your outline. Let's pray it right now for the rest of this day.

### **PRAYER**

"God give me clarity when you provide the opportunity. Lord, open doors today and then empower us to walk through them, in Jesus' name Amen."

There is no telling what will happen. Imagine if a 1000 of us start praying that prayer every day! Imagine what might happen just in November! Pray for opportunities, every day.

If we are really going to follow the supreme Christ, we must talk with God about people. In the second section Paul flips this truth. If we are really

going to follow Christ, we must also talk with people about God. We must prepare in prayer, but that is not sufficient. Prayer is not an excuse for inactivity, but preparation for action. Our prayer prepares us to

### **Talk to people about God**

God the Father sent Jesus into the world and now in the same way Jesus sends His followers into the world. The Bible calls us ambassadors. We are the ones God has chosen to deliver His message to the world. Why are we here? We have a world-wide, eternity-changing mission empowered by the Creator of the universe. God calls us to

### **Seize Opportunities Wisely**

<sup>5</sup> *Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.* This the fourth time Paul has used the Greek word for “act” in Colossians. In chapter one he prayed that we would live a life worthy of the Lord. We should handle ourselves in a God-honoring way, a way that is Christlike, wise. Wisdom is another major theme, mentioned in every chapter. Paul prayed that we would be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding (1:9); and teaches us with all wisdom to bring us to maturity in Christ (1:28), in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:3). We enhance or damage Christ’s reputation by whether we are acting wisely or foolishly. How many non-Christians justify their unbelief by Christian’s hypocrisy!

When Paul says we are to make the most of every opportunity he uses a powerful image from the commercial language of the market place; we are to buy up every opportunity like determined bargain hunters, snap up the bargains, lest our opportunity slips away. It’s like you are on E-Bay watching the time tick down on the auction. You make your bid at the last second to grab the bargain. That’s to be our attitude for the Gospel.

Other translations say we are to redeem the time. The Word the NIV translates “opportunity” is the Greek word *kairos*, which means moment of opportunity, in distinction from another word *chronos* which indicates time as measured by clocks and calendars. *Kairos* can denote a critical or unique time, a moment of destiny, a fitting season. Here it refers to gospel opportunities, given in answer to our prayers. The metaphor of “buying up the time” implies that believers must capitalize on every opportunity.

You are part of the answer to your prayer for open doors: seize them.

What do opportunities look like? Think with me of possible open doors. Picture open doors with names on the front. One door is named: *health*. Illness, hospitals and medical tests provide opportunity to talk about the great healer. A door named *family*, gives opportunity to talk about the One who gives wisdom, the One who is the best Father. A door named *world news*, gives opportunity to talk about the only One who can really bring peace to a world at war. A door named *good news*, gives opportunity to give thanks to the One from whom all blessings flow including deals closing, promotions, and winning contests. Recently I walked through a door named *young children*. A man said he is not in church, but his five year old is starting to ask about God and Jesus. I walked through another door named *counseling*. A lady asked for help with step-family relationships in her new marriage. Think of possible opportunities before you this week in existing relationships. Where do you see open doors? What's the name of the front of the open doors God has given you? Seize opportunities.

Let me get you started on seeing open doors: a *Kairos* of Thanksgiving is coming. What a huge open door to talk about the One to whom we give thanks. We have a special thanksgiving service on November 19<sup>th</sup>, the Sunday before Thanksgiving. It is great *kairos* to invite friends. Some people tell me it is their favorite service of the year.

Christmas is coming, another *kairos*. We are doing a special Christmas series entitled *What's in a Name?* We will look into four wonderful names of our Lord given to Him when He was born. During this Christmas season each worship service in each venue will have special music. Will you send out Christmas cards? You have an opportunity. Will you have a Christmas party? You have an opportunity. As a Life Group, it is great to throw a party over the holidays and invite friends outside the group. I encourage you to seize the *karios* of the season.

Not only does Paul tell us to seize opportunities with our actions, but also to salt our conversations. We must not only live the truth, but we must speak it. No one can be saved just from seeing an example; they must hear the truth. Remember one of the requests we are to pray for is to speak the message clearly.

### **Salt conversations**

The revelation of God in Christ has already been given in history, and written in Scripture. But it must also be spoken by Christ's followers if people's minds are to be opened to the truth.

I know it may not be good for me, but I love salt. It frustrates my wife when I pick up the salt shaker before I've even tasted the dish she made, but it's just habit. Salt spices things up. Who'd want corn on the cob without it? When we eat something that tastes a little bland we reach for the salt in order to enhance the flavor. In order for salt to have impact, it must be potent enough to have an effect. And it has to get close to whatever it's supposed to affect. Salt requires both *potency* and *proximity* to have impact. We must be close with non-Christian people and we must speak with enough potency to make a difference. Our lives and words should make people thirst for Christ. When we speak it should be gracious.

### **Graciously**

Salt your conversations graciously. Speak of God's grace with graciousness, with love, tact, kindness, not ugly or offensive. Some people are offensive in sharing about their faith. Others take graciousness to an extreme using it as an excuse not to share because they are so hypersensitive about offending non-Christians that they never present them with God's truth clearly. We must share the truth and do it graciously and personally.

### **Personally**

Paul says we should know how to answer everyone, meaning each individual person. Each one is unique and special. Customize and personalize your conversation to each person. Do not give a canned presentation. That is not gracious or personal. The key here is that we are answering *their* questions. Notice that Jesus' conversations with each person were so different. Contrast His conversations with Nicodemus the Pharisee, the women at well and the blind man. In love Jesus met each person at their point of need.

So, how do we salt our conversations with gracious truth personally? Sprinkle your conversations with Scripture without giving the reference. In a stressful situation, say, "*each day has enough trouble of its own.*" That's in the Bible if you did not know. Think how you could salt everyday conversations with spiritual salt. Salt is not the whole meal. Who wants to eat a mound of salt? Too much salt will gag you. Salt is best in small dashes.

- After your employee pays you a compliment about how great it is to work with you, you say: “We’ve been looking for someone like you. You’re filling a huge void I prayed about for a long time.”
- When someone does a great job, you say: “It seems to me that God has really gifted you in your ability to manage details.”
- When someone opens up about a struggle, you say: “Boy, that’s a tough situation. If it’s okay with you, I would love to pray for you.”
- In response to a positive comment about your ethical behavior, you say: “Although I don’t always get it right, I’m trying to follow the principles the Bible teaches that appear to me to still be so effective for our business dealings – even today. That’s important to me.”
- On closing a great deal, you say: “Everyone worked really hard but God surely blessed us on this one.”
- In a conversation with someone who mentions that he is discouraged, you say: “I remember a time when I was more discouraged than I had ever been. A friend suggested I read some passages in the Bible, and it really helped me. Could I share one with you?”
- During a conversation about marriage, you say: “I can’t believe how much of a difference it’s made in two stubborn people’s lives to get in tune with the spiritual dimension of life.”

Spiritual salt should be a natural part of conversation. They are not random messages that fly in from left field. They are intentional but not contrived – a simple expression of the reality of your faith at a given moment. You can salt the conversation in less than twenty seconds. Salt is a comment, not a commentary. Salt your conversations with spiritual truth graciously and personally.

See how it all fits together. You talk to God about people persistently, alertly and thankfully. You ask God for opportunity and clarity. Then you talk to people about God, seizing the opportunities for which you have prayed and salting conversations with God given clarity.

Imagine if we all joined God’s great mission. What a spiritual adventure. What if we each dared to pray every day that God will give us opportunity and clarity? Then if we were alert throughout the day and when the opportunity comes, seized it wisely. What might happen if we all salt conversations with spiritual truth. Imagine what God could do through our church family. Prayerfully seize opportunities to show and share the gospel. Be alert for open doors and walk through them. Pray everyday for

opportunities and then seize them in God's power for Christ's glory.  
Remember it is all about Jesus Christ.

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