

## Colossians 4:2-6

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Date: 17 November 2024

Preacher: Eric Morse

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, good morning. Thank you, worship team, for leading us in such reverent worship. It's a privilege to sing with you all. My name is Eric. If you don't know me, I am one of the pastors here at the church, and I get the privilege of teaching this morning. And I just want to, a few things up the offset here before we get into God's Word. Thank you to Josh and to David, two of our elders that have preached the last few weeks. They did a fantastic job handling the Word of God. I'm grateful to them. But also, I wanted to just make a quick announcement slash shout out to y'all.

I've been in ministry for about 10 years, and God has blessed richly every one of those, and I'm grateful for each one. But there's a certain person that has watched me from the very first hour of ministry and saw me do those first rough, painful years. And he is visiting here this Sunday, and I'm grateful to call him a friend. His name is Brolin, and his wife Stephanie and their team that's going to be planning a church. And I'm going to ask them to come up in a minute, but before I do that, I just wanted to say we get an honor and a privilege today to recognize what God is doing in a very similar situation as ours. There's a group of people here who are looking to honor God and glorify him and see people come to Christ by planting a church in Spokane. And so I'm going to invite Brolin and Stephanie to come forward at this time. Some of you may already know this couple. You may recognize them from just their connection at Fourth Memorial back in the day, but I'm going to let

Brolin speak here just for a minute on quickly what they're doing, where they're going, a little bit of an overview so that we know how to pray for them, and then I'm going to pray for them as a church. Thanks, Eric. And it was a privilege in seeing some of our youth from when Eric first came, and it's a pretty big blessing to be with here. Once again, my name is Brolin Rosequist. This is my wife Stephanie, and we are going to be planting in North Spokane. Our church name is Lilac City Church, and our aim is to help people trust and follow Jesus. And so we're looking forward to just being a similar light like you guys are here on the South Hill on the North Side. We definitely see God working in unique ways.

Our sending church is Connection Point Church, which is another church that's part of the Inland Northwest Cooperative. And so we're very thankful to be sent out from a church much like Lampstand is here, and we're looking forward to what God's doing in the future. We are going to be commissioned out in January, and we're going to be beginning doing preview services over the next weeks and months.

[ 2 : 5 2 ] And so some ways to be praying. First is like we're looking for God to do a work in North Spokane where, similar to the South Hill, we know that there's about 156,000 people who don't have a church home in North Spokane. And that's a lot of people. That is over 80 percent of the people in North Spokane that don't go to church regularly. And so we're looking for to partner with you guys here on the South Hill on the North Side to be working together for the sake of the gospel, for his glory, so that we can help people just be rooted in Jesus, cultivated in community, and reach the world.

So that's a little bit about us. Yeah, thanks so much for sharing. If you are part of that crew that's going, could you put your hand up real quick so we can identify and see you? Thank you for being here. We're so glad you're here. I'm going to ask the elders at this time to come forward, and we're going to put hands on Brolin and Stephanie as we pray. And then the rest of us, I'm going to ask you to extend a hand either towards Brolin and Stephanie, or maybe you've got two hands, maybe towards the team over here as well. But just let's extend our hands in prayer as we pray over this church plant and this light in the North Side. So let's pray. God, we thank you for this team. We thank you for this incredible opportunity, Lord, to see another church planted in our city. And God, we ask above and beyond anything that we could even imagine, Lord, that you would see the

gospel move in North Spokane. Thank you for the churches that are already there proclaiming your word, such as Connection Point, being willing to sacrifice by giving of their people and their time and their treasures, Lord, to see this happen. So I pray a special blessing on both the Sending Church,

Connecting Point, and Barry and the team, but also over Brolin, Stephanie, and their crew, Lord. May you do a work, and I pray, Lord, as this church goes out, Lord, would you protect them from the attacks of the enemy? Lord, would you bind him and keep him from attack? Give them the full armor of God as they go into this endeavor to see your gospel go forward, to see Christ proclaimed and see lives changed. So, Lord, we pray over this team. Would you give them the grace, the unity, and the harmony that they're going to need to be one body located in the north of Spokane for your glory? We love you, Lord.

In your name we pray. Amen. Thank you. Yeah, you bet. Thank you. Thanks for being here. Yeah. Well, thank you so much. Lilac City Church, once more, put it on your prayer list. Let's keep them before the Lord as a church. Well, great. As you guys know, we are in the book of Colossians. We have two more messages. We're almost through. We got today, we're going to be in verses two to six, and then next week we're going to finish up chapter four to finish the book, and I'm excited for these two weeks. We have worked through a lot of beautiful theology. Colossians is a book that's all about the splendor of Jesus. Whether it be in the church, in the world, in our hearts, Paul takes a massive book to essentially say Jesus is so marvelous, and he's worth all of our affection. That's what Colossians is about. So in the highlight of the book, chapter two, verse six to seven, Paul gives his sort of magnum opus idea for the book, which is this. Therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus, so walk in him, rooted in, built up in him. That's the idea of Colossians. And so from that, we will springboard again, as we've done through the entire back half of Colossians, chapter three and chapter four are all about applying that principle, being rooted in Jesus. And what does it lead to?

So today, we have a really cool topic, and it's about winsome witness, the splendor of Jesus and winsome witness. But I have a question for us. What is a witness? And why have I chosen this word to summarize the text for this morning? Well, legally speaking, a witness is someone who can testify to the truth of an event of a proceeding. Maybe casually speaking, a witness is someone that can attest that something actually happened. Okay, think, I bowled a 300 last weekend.

[ 7 : 36 ] And you look that person in the eye, and you say, wow, that's like an impossible feat for the average person. Did anybody witness it? If you're like me, I'm skeptical. Or how about this one? You're playing golf, and the person you're playing with is like, man, I hope I get another hole-in-one like I got last time I played. What do you immediately go to? Who played with you? This actually happened to me.

Last time I played golf, me and my brother-in-law Dallas were playing, and we're playing with my other brother-in-law, Mark, and Pops. And here's what happened. Dallas hits this massive, he's a huge dude, he can hit the ball a mile. Massive drive that completely veers off the fairway. And we go look for this thing, and we can't find it. For three or four minutes, we're driving around, where did this ball go? And finally we look, and we see there's a cinder block outhouse with a doorway that's about this big. You can barely get through it. It's a tiny little outhouse. And Dallas goes, I bet it's in there. So we walk around the side. I don't even know the angle. It doesn't even work.

And we walk in, and there's the ball sitting right on the edge of the toilet. Okay, now listen. As I say that, I guarantee you're thinking, who saw that besides you in Dallas, right? You need another witness. But let me tell you, I was a witness to it. Dallas got a bowl and won, all right? It was unreal. But here's the thing about being a witness.

A witness validates something that is true and real. And what we're going to see in the text today, Colossians 4, 2 to 6, is Paul is going to put this to the test. And here's what he's all about in this section of scripture. He's going to tell the Colossians this, that we are witnesses of the gospel.

[ 9 : 28 ] He doesn't use the word witness here, but this is what he's talking about. We are witnesses of the gospel, of the love of Christ, of the goodness of God. And in that calling to witness to Jesus, there are some things that we need to consider. So here's, I'm just going to give it to you right off the bat. Here's our main point for Sunday, for this morning. Winsome witness begins with prayer, continues in wisdom, and is completed by God. And if you're like, man, that is a long mouthful, big idea. Well, we'll unpack it. Yes, it is. Winsome witness begins with prayer, continues in

wisdom, and is completed by God. And as we jump into this, keep a finger in Colossians 4 really quickly. I want you to turn with me to the book of Acts chapter 1. This is going to set up this whole idea of what being a witness is. Acts chapter 1, real quick, we're going to read just the first eight verses.

Now, the book of Acts is all about Jesus' followers going forward from him and being witnesses in all of the world. That's what the entire book of Acts is about. All 28 chapters are people witnessing to the truth of the gospel. So let me read this real quick, and you'll see why we're reading this. Acts 1.1, in the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God. Jesus is the first witness.

Here's who God is. Here's what his kingdom is like. He's so good. He witnesses to the goodness of God to his disciples. And then look at this. And while staying with them, he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which he said, you heard from me. For John baptized with water, and you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. So when they had come together, they asked him, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? And notice what Jesus responds with.

And he said to them, it is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.

[ 11 : 43 ] And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth. Our role as witnesses stems from Jesus himself.

And what Paul is going to say in 2 to 6 is that there is a way to do this. And that way is important because it's God-ordained, it's God-prescribed. So when you and I think about being a part of the church which is called to be the witness of Jesus Christ and all of his goodness and glory in Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the world, here's what Paul's going to say. Here's how we do that. And it starts with number one, prayerful witness. Prayerful witness. The role of prayer in winsome witness. So let's read verse 2 to 4 and we'll kind of break this down.

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. Love this. Paul starts this out with continue. And what's so important about the word continue? And what does it have to do with being prayerful in our witness? So why does that matter? Well continue implies the carrying out of something that has already begun. There's a process that's already been started and he's saying jump in on it and keep going. In other words, this train has been moving on this track for a while and he wants you to take the caboose and add it to the train. What is that train? Continue, he says.

The prayer that the believers are called to in winsome witness is the same prayer that he is calling us to join in that Christ himself initiated. What do I mean by that? Well there's an amazing, amazing prayer in John 17. And in this prayer, if you've read it before, it's Jesus' high priestly prayer.

Right before he goes to be crucified and betrayed into the hands of sinners, what does Jesus do? He gets on his knees in the garden of Gethsemane. He looks to the Lord and he prays. But if you'll notice the second half, the second piece of John chapter 17, who is he praying for? He's praying for those who would come to believe in him and for those who have already followed him. He prays for the witnesses for the witnesses that are to be. And when Paul says continue, he's implying this, that prayer is not something we choose to do. Prayer is who we are. Continue. It's, I know you're Christians. I know you're believers in Jesus and you're a church. Keep going in that identity, which is prayer. Meaning prayer is a really important part, not just of witness, but of being a Christian. And so here's what he says, continue steadfastly is what the ESV says. Other translations, your translation may say something like devote yourself, which I think is a little bit more helpful. Devote yourself in passion to being a prayerful person. But then he says this, being watchful in it. So we know we're to pray because that's who we are. We know that's what Jesus did. He prayed for others. He prayed for the gospel to go forward. But not only that, he says this, be watchful in it. So we have to ask a question here. And you're probably thinking the same thing that I thought when I was reading and studying this. I see this command to continue in prayer, that it's important to be devoted to it, to be passionate about it, to continue in it. And if you're like me, here's what I'm thinking. Why do I find it so difficult to pray? Because I read this and I get discouraged immediately.

Man, what does it look like to pray steadfastly, to be devoted to this? And why do I struggle to pray? And if you are there this morning wondering why it can be difficult to pray, I want to encourage you with the next phrase that Paul very strategically puts in with Thanksgiving. I would argue that with Thanksgiving is the very fuel that fires up our heart to pray. In other words, if you are finding it difficult to pray this morning, as I often do, maybe it starts with this. Lord, you know what? I'm just going to journal, write down, go through in my mind, each and every way in which you have richly blessed me.

[16:42] Try this as an exercise. If we take the time to be grateful for what God has done in our lives, it will naturally stimulate those fibers of prayer.

Because the only thing that a person who is grateful to God can do is to thank Him directly for it. And prayer starts with gratitude.

So another thing I want to encourage us with is this. In our prayers, He says to be watchful. So what does this mean, to be watchful in prayer?

Well, I think this is an image of a watcher atop his tower at night. Imagine a castle and it's well-walled and there's someone on top who looks out during the night to see, is any danger approaching. But not only is any danger approaching, maybe the day comes and now they're looking for a shipment of goods that they ordered. Or people, friends from a far away town that's come near. Whatever it may be, they're watching out for activity outside the walls.

That's the word Paul uses, be watchful in it. What does that mean for us practically? Well, maybe it means being watchful for the enemy's temptations. Where is it in your life that you know the devil likes to push? That piece of temptation that seems to grasp so easily. Whether it be pride or lust or gossip, whatever the temptation may be, that you know you can fall into easily. Here's what Paul says, be watchful for that thing in prayer. Ask the Lord, Lord, you know I struggle with that.

[18:14] I'm giving it to you. Keep me from temptation. As he asks us to pray in the Lord's prayer. But maybe it also means this, being watchful for false doctrine, for lies that come from either the enemy directly or through others. Maybe it means being watchful for opportunities to bless other people. Yes, watchful can mean a myriad of things. We don't know exactly what Paul was intending here, but I'm just going to cover it all because it's all good. Being watchful for reasons to thank God. Have you ever tried praying like that? Lord, give me the eyes to see. I'm struggling to even come up with things that I should be thankful for. Give me the eyes to see past my sin to the things that you're doing that I haven't given you thanks for. Maybe that's what being watchful means. Or maybe this, finally, being watchful for witness opportunities, which I would argue is the direct contextual idea here. That perhaps what Paul means with this phrase is to pray continually and be watchful for opportunities to share Jesus.

So what role does prayer play in witness to outsiders? Let's work through these quickly. First, prayer cultivates a heart of gratitude as we already saw. Being watchful in it with thanksgiving. Why does prayer matter? Why can't I just go out and just start telling people about Jesus? Well, you can do that.

But Paul's saying that prayer is a huge piece of our witness. And if you're like me, sometimes I can struggle to get motivated to talk about Jesus. I don't want to talk about Jesus. I don't want to witness for him. Or maybe my heart's just wrong in that aspect of evangelism and teaching about Christ. Here's what I do know. Paul says, hey, prayer is what cultivates gratitude. And why does that matter? Well, we know this, that gratitude is important for witnessing. Because we have to offer the world what we've already received from Christ. Brothers and sisters, what in the world qualifies you to proclaim the good news of Jesus? Jesus, who came to take our sin and to give us new life. That is your qualification. That is our story. You have lived the gospel. You've experienced and tasted of its goodness. You own it. So go out with gratitude for what Jesus has done for you and pray and watch him work in our hearts. What are you grateful for today? Prayer, prayer tonight to God and thank him for each spiritual blessing you have received through Jesus. And watch your heart grow for outsiders three times in size, even more than the Grinch, five times. Prayer is how we go from a Grinch-like attitude towards outsiders. Too grateful. Ready for Jesus to work. Number two, prayer shapes our hearts to be others-focused. Look with me in this text again, how Paul says this, continue to say it fastly in prayer, being watchful of thanksgiving. And then verse three, at the same time, pray also for us that God may open to us a door for the word. In other words, this is what Paul's saying. Hey, pray for your body, pray for your heart, pray for your witness, but don't forget, also pray for us. I love this. And Paul uses two phrases here that convey that prayer shapes

our hearts to be others-focused. He says first, at the same time, while you're praying for you and your church, pray also is the other word he uses. And these two terms imply that prayer is something that is inward-focused. Yes, we go to God with our concerns. We go to God with our heart. But also this, and we can lose sight of this so quickly, it's outward, others-focused as well. As we saw John 17, Jesus pours his heart out to the Father, an amazing display of reverent, intimate, and devoted prayer. But I want to encourage us to be outward-focused in our prayer lives.

[ 22 : 26 ] The next time you pray in private, try and notice who's the subject of your prayers. If you're like me, I get so caught up in my own wants, my own needs, my own anxieties, my own issues, that my prayers are only filled with me and I. And as important as it is to go to God with the cares of our hearts, it is equally important to go to God with love and concern for the cares of others.

Now here's the question, who are the others? Well, first, our spiritual family. Pray for one another, we're told in Scripture. Yes, pray for your brothers and sisters that their heart might be inflamed for witness. But here's also what I want us to consider that I think Paul is getting at.

Second, pray for the outside world that is without Christ. Notice the specific ask that Paul is making of the Colossians of the prayer. He says this, pray for us that God may open the door for the Word. In other words, pray that God would give us witness opportunity with the outside world that they may also see the splendor of Jesus. And he describes it this way, the mystery of God, which we've discussed in previous passages, means what? That Jesus is the yes to every promise of God. That in every single way, Jesus fulfills completely the redemptive plan from the beginning of time that God set out. Jesus is the mystery revealed that we all need. So here's what Paul says, pray that a door would be open for that mystery, that Word, Jesus Himself, to go through and touch and reach the outside world.

Number three, prayer opens doors for the gospel to work. And right on this point, pray for us that God may open a door to the Word. I'm going to double down on this. Paul's theology, I'm going to notice here in this section, is not that God opens doors, listen carefully, it's not that God opens doors for us to walk through as if we were the bearers and the very ones that have salvation at our lips, but instead notice what Paul says, that he may open to us a door, not for us, for the Word. This is important for Paul. The very man who preached across all the world, who talked about Jesus everywhere he went, he knows, don't be praying for me to get through and save somebody. Pray for the gospel to work its way in.

[ 25 : 06 ] I want us to notice this word door. Now this word door in the Greek can refer to many different things. The biggest image is a doorway or a gate that allows for passage into some other realm or world, if you will.

Think of Jesus in, when he was laid in the tomb, it said this, that they took a great stone and covered the entrance to the tomb. That's that word door. The entrance is a place to go into the tomb. Or think of this as well, Jesus says, I am the door, which is an image of a sheep gate. I'm the gate that lets the sheep in. We're not talking about as much that usage. It's a general gateway, but this term that Paul is using, this usage refers more to a habitable space. In other words, when you see the word door in the New Testament, typically it's going to refer to a home or a living space that you can go in and out of.

So here's what Paul is saying with this term. Think Revelation 3, Jesus saying this, behold, I stand at the door and knock. I want to come in. I want to live in that habitable space, which is your heart. In other words, Paul is saying that the goal of Winsome Witness is to see the gospel and habit lost hearts, lost homes, lost cities, and a lost world. Literally, the word of Jesus needs to go and habit these places. This is a God-sized task and a massive vision. And guess how this gets done, according to Paul. Don't miss this. Prayer. Prayer. If you want to see that door open in the heart of your co-worker, in the heart of your lost neighbor or friend, here's what Paul is saying directly to you through the text, inspired by the word of God, pray that that door would be open.

I know for us, we have a neighbor right to the side of us. Me and my wife pray often for him and his roommates. That the gospel would work its way through. And if the Lord chooses to use me and my words or my wife's words or our loving actions and gestures, praise be to God. But here's what we're praying for. Penetrate that home with your gospel, O Lord. Number four, prayer refocuses our perspective from temporal to eternal. This one's mind-blowing. Look what Paul says here. After, pray for us, pray for the gospel to go forward. He says this, here's the reason. To declare the mystery of Christ on account of which I am in prison. How sobering is that? Even in the midst of

earthly persecution, Paul keeps the goal of outsiders hearing about Jesus, the apple of his eye. This is the situation. Paul is writing the letter to the Colossians from Rome under house arrest, which means Paul is literally chained probably to a floor and simultaneously, this is how Romans did things, to a soldier. Now the Romans should have fought before they chained the greatest evangelist ever to their own soldiers. Because what do you think

Paul's doing? I love this. Okay, here's what he's, here's what he's saying. I am going to declare Jesus on account of which I'm in chains. I'm in this home. I'm imprisoned. And here's what I want. I want the gospel to go forward in any door that the Lord opens up. And what is the immediate door that he's opening probably in Paul's situation? The guy he's chained to. I love this. So it's almost like Paul saying, pray for the people that have imprisoned me in my home, that I may preach the gospel to them.

[ 28 : 57 ] That's most likely what he's referring to, even though he doesn't say explicitly. But here's what I want us to get for us in our edification. What would you do if you were in Paul's place?

I immediately think of fear or self-centeredness. Being chained and imprisoned on account of the gospel is no small thing. It happens across the world every day, all day. You can read about it just with a simple Google search, persecuted Christians, and let Google fill in the blank.

What would we do if we're in Paul's situation? And if, and on top of that, if you were given a note card, you could write one prayer request down that was guaranteed to get to the church of your choice.

Jesus, what would you write on that note card? I think most of us would write, pray the Lord would free me from this and that I would be delivered. That's not necessarily a wrong request. We should pray for the deliverance of these things. But here's what Paul, this is what Paul does. Here's his note card. I get one request. All right, send that off. Colossians get the request and they receive his letter. Imagine, he's in prison and they know it. Pray that the gospel would reach the people I'm with right now. This is a perspective that is eternal and looks beyond the temporal. Number five, prayer emboldens us to proclaim Christ. Notice what he says here, to declare the mystery of Christ. And then he finishes this verse with this, that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. Here's Paul's prayer request. Not that he would open the door, just that he would open the door, but also that he would make it so clear for my words that I would know the words to say to the person I'm with.

This is powerful because guess what Paul does again? He ties prayer as the act that unleashes these things. The door that gets opened into the heart of the lost person, the words that I speak, that the word travels through the door. Every part of this is dependent on prayer. So here's the call.

[ 31 : 14 ] Here's the application for us. We need to pray. And we need to pray like lost souls depend on it. Because according to Paul, they do. So I'm actually going to pray right now for our neighborhood and our community, and I'll also be praying for North Spokane because our brothers and sisters are here. So let's pray real quick.

Lord, we ask that you would open doors into the hearts and homes of our neighborhoods. Lord, for the Moran Prairie right here where we are rooted in, God, would you use your word to mightily knock down walls of opposition? That Lord, Jesus would walk through and knock and get in. God, may the ministry of Lampstead and the ministry of Lilac City be such, Lord, that we are completely dependent on your work and your moving in our midst, Lord. Help us to be dependent. Help us to see that any sort of winsome witness that you have given us as a privilege would only be because of your work through prayer. So God, may we be a prayerful people, and may you open doors in every phase of our communities, Lord, that the word may go forth. In the name we pray. Amen. Second here is wise witness. So the first section Paul hits is prayerful witness. That in order to witness for Jesus, we need to be prayerful.

But now he's going to move to wisdom. What is the role of wisdom and winsome witness? And this is verse 5 and 6. Would you read with me quickly verse 5 and 6? Paul finishes the passage here by saying this, 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 to answer each person.

What I believe Paul is hinting at here is this. Yes, we can define wisdom in a myriad of different ways. And yes, I'm going to be really honest with you. I studied all the commentaries I had on Colossians on what does Paul mean with wisdom because it's one of the most broad terms you could possibly imagine.

And there's not a consensus on the exact type of wisdom he's speaking about other than words. But here's what I will say. You know what wisdom looks like in witnessing for Jesus? Gracious words, kind speech, all of those things don't matter at all unless this is true.

[ 33 : 44 ] wise witness looks like building relationships, connecting with, being friends with, associating with the outside world.

Some would call this relational evangelism. I believe Paul's goal in mind here is relationship. And I think for such a long time in the church, I've been a part of this, we have seen evangelism and we've said, this is what it means to evangelize.

To go into the places where non-believers are and just start talking about the gospel, even though nobody knows who we are. And don't get me wrong, the Lord can use that.

He did a lot in Acts. Let's look at all those sermons that Peter and Paul give to all these massive congregations that don't really know them. But here's what I think Paul is calling us to. He's calling us to relationship.

And the reason I say that is that he says this, walk in wisdom toward outsiders, which implies what? First, that we are connected with outsiders.

[ 34 : 51 ] But second, that we have relations with them that are such that we speak to them. And there's a back and forth dialogue.

So what is wise witness? From the office to the classroom, from the grocery store to the coffee shop, from the driver who cut you off on the way here to the giver of a random act of kindness, from the contractor working on your home to the customer you are servicing, from the stranger across the city to the neighbor across the street, in every interaction, the pathway is set up before us.

Here's what Paul wants. Be wise and pursue relationships with the world. So three things here. Let's define this a little bit.

Urgent in heart. Paul says this, make the best use of the time. And here's what I love with this phrase, make the best use of the time. You are hearing from somebody who has spent every waking moment of his life ever since being converted on that Damascus road by the grace of God. Every waking moment of his life has been devoted to one thing. And what is it? Witnessing to the lost world about Jesus. And he says to us, make the best use of the time.

[ 36 : 08 ] I take this to Paul to mean this. Don't hesitate to start building relationships and connecting with outsiders today.

Why? Why? Why is it so important that we start on this now? Because relationships take time. I want to just help guide us in this.

I know this can be a daunting task. Making relationships, building connections with non-believers. How do I do that? Where do I even start? For me, this was a hard one that I didn't really pursue for a long time, even in pastoral ministry.

But by the grace of God, he woke me up to this and started convicting me that my life was filled with believers. Yes, to the glory of God, we were called to do life in the church, but was absent of outsiders.

So here's some of the ways that I want to encourage us to consider forming connections and make the best use of the time. Join a fitness club or gym. There's a lot of them on the South Hill. A lot of them all over town.

[ 37 : 10 ] That's been a big one for me. In forming a relation, or excuse me, in joining a tennis club for me, it's been huge. And meeting and forming relationships with non-believers who I would never have connected with otherwise.

Pick up a new hobby. Pickleball is all the craze. You can get connected with non-believers like that. Just go to a pickleball court on a Saturday morning. Boom. You've started your habit.

Okay, next one. Crocheting and knitting. My mom and my sister were part of a crocheting sort of social group in our city that was all non-believers, essentially.

And they would go there and knit to the glory of God. Board games. There's board game clubs all over Spokane. Every time I go into an uncle games or a board game, there are like seven tables filled with 50 plus people playing board games.

Just start playing board games. Just walk in and say, I want to play this game with you. They will love it. And what a great way to build relationships. Art classes, art groups. There's a million ways to pick up a new hobby for the glory of God to make the best use of the time.

[ 38 : 13 ] Or this one. This is a simple one. Don't spend your day off at a coffee shop. I know this one works because I do it a lot. I'm working out of coffee shops. They're basically in my office. A shout out to Thomas Hammer on Grand.

I owe them a lot of money for rent that I'm never paying. Unbelievable, the amount of people that I'm starting to say, hey, what's up, Raj? We just started going to the same coffee shops and he's an entrepreneur and he works out of coffee shops all day.

And I see him all the time. But it's also amazing when you sit down at a coffee shop, you sit down next to somebody. How many times I've had a Bible open doing sermon prep and someone has had the courage just to see me with the Bible and to say, hey, are you a pastor?

Yeah, I am. Can I ask you a question? You don't have to be a pastor to do that. Just spend time in the world of outsiders and see what happens.

But also this one. Visit the same bank teller. Visit the same oil change place. Visit the same coffee stand on your way to work. Visit the same grocery store. And even the same checkout aisle. Visit the same dentist.

[ 39 : 15 ] On and on and on. Why? Because as you do that, you will naturally build relations for those people. Case in point. I am so encouraged by our young people. Young guys on setup team.

This morning, we're praying together as a group. It's part of our church prayer in the morning. And one of them says, hey, can we pray for convenience store guy? Sure.

What's his name? We don't know. But we know it's the convenience store right down the road. Our boys do a setup. A lot of them will go down there, buy some sugared up treats. Yes. Come back to the glory of God with monsters and mini donuts.

And I just found out these teenage boys have been going down there and they've been talking and interacting with this same checkout guy at the convenience store. And one of them this morning asked them to come to church.

And they said, yeah, we'll come. That, I'm convinced, happened because they've repeated relationship that's been built even over four or five months of going to the same guy.

[ 40 : 17 ] Hey, boys, what's up? I'm sure they love the boys coming in. Be intentional with the time you have is what Paul wants. Second, gracious in speech. Speech.

Let your speech be gracious seasoned with salt. And I want to just highlight here, this is not just about being kind with your words and being gracious. Yes, that's important. But I want us to even think a little deeper here.

How do we use our words and witness? Paul uses a very intentional phrase here, an analogy, if you will. He says seasoned with salt. And you'd have to do a lot of work to find out.

Why did he season with salt? That's a really weird term to put on speech. There's no analogy of words being salt or anything like them, even in historical examples.

So I have one, yet one, but one conclusion for us, and it's this. Paul's alluding to something. He's borrowing from the great teacher.

[ 41 : 22 ] You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? I love what Mark's gospel adds to this. Mark adds this, have salt in yourselves and be at peace with each other.

What is a clear marker of what it means to be salt in the world? The presence of peace in our words and in our relationships. In other words, when Paul says, let your speech be gracious, he is literally suggesting, and I believe in this world, in this context, in this culture we're in today, that being gracious with our words is a very clear way to stand out.

Jesus meant it that way. You're the salt of the earth. You stand out. You're the light of the world. You're different than the world, and that's how people see me. Here's what Paul says.

Letting your speech be gracious is a prime way to stand out. I don't know about you, in the last season we just went through, this election cycle, gracious speech is not on trend.

And here's what Paul wants. He wants the church to be so kind and so others focused and so believing the best in our speech that people can't help but wonder and see what is going on.

[ 42 : 50 ] People don't talk like that. Perhaps one way we stand out from the culture of accusatory, opinionated, and apathetic dialogue is to ask curious, loving questions.

Be curious about people. Ask how they're doing but really mean it. Ask how you can help them and serve them, even non-believers. This is the context we're in. Ask how you can be a blessing to them.

These are words they're not hearing from the world. Are you a worker of peace in your worldly relationships? Are you a gracious speaker everywhere you go?

And then thirdly, presence in relationship. Here's what it means to be wise in our witness so that you may know how to answer each person. And this one's the kicker.

If we're gracious in our speech, if we're connected with the non-believing world and building relationships, by making the best of the time, here's the outcome. That people will ask questions.

[ 43 : 53 ] That's the conclusion for Paul. I love this. He's assuming if you build relationships, if you're gracious and you stand out and you're loving the world and you're building those relationships, here's what's going to happen.

They're going to ask questions. That's the assumption. And so here's what he says. Have wisdom in how you answer them. In other words, be present and ready when those deeper questions come. And I can attest to this.

The more that I've gotten to know a few different individuals in the world and connected with them and built relationships with them, the more over time they begin to open up and start asking bigger questions.

I don't think Paul's speaking as much about apologetics here. Although there's certainly a time for that. I think he's actually speaking about being ready to answer the questions of the world that are deep in nature.

Soul searching in nature. The questions come when the relationship is built. And it's in that time where we stand up with the spirit within us and we speak Christ.

[ 45 : 01 ] Questions may come like this. How is it you seem to have it all together? I've heard Christians say that's been asked of them many times. Why do I get the vibe that something's different about you? Maybe that's one of those questions Paul's referring to.

You seem like the person, the type of person who has some wisdom. Can I ask you for some wisdom? So what's the big deal with this Jesus guy that you serve? Why do you follow him? These are maybe some of the questions we're going to get.

Yes, along with the accusatory ones and the ones that challenge our faith. But I think we need to be more optimistic in thinking that Paul wants us to be ready, gracious, to answer the world.

Finally, end with this. This is the God-willed part. God-willed witness, the role of God's sovereignty and winsome witness. There's three words that I want to end our message with today. That God may.

Right in the heart of this section, in verse 3, here's what Paul says, at the same time, pray also for us that God may. And this might be the most important part of our entire idea of what it means to be winsome in our witness.

[ 46 : 12 ] God is the one who does the winning of sinners, not us. 1 Corinthians 3, what then is Apollos?

What is Paul? What is Eric? What is Brolin? Servants through whom you have believed as the Lord has assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

This is what Paul says elsewhere. Neither he who plants for waters is anything, but God who gives the growth. And here's what Paul's theology is. It's so heavy. It's so weighty.

It's such a high view of God, such a small view of himself, that he says these words. Pray, pray, pray. Be wise, be wise, be wise. Witness, witness, witness, so that God may.

It's up to God to open that door of the heart and bring a sinner into salvation. He implores us to pray, recognizing that we are dependent on God for everything.

[ 47 : 12 ] He uses language that reveals his theology. The phrase, that God may, again, everything hinges on this phrase. Paul essentially says, if God wills it by his good pleasure to make it happen in conjunction with our asking, that's what that word may is implying.

Then he will do it. And we will be faithful and found faithful to witness to Jesus. Time is limited. I want to share a quick story to finish. One of my really, really good friends plays hockey and that's his way of interacting with the world.

And in urging us to consider that what Paul says make a best use of the time, this friend of mine is a wonderful, Christ-centered, God-honoring witness.

I love him and I've learned so much from him. And he shared that he was playing hockey for the last two or three years. There was a friend of his that he got to know that was not a believer. And he started building this relationship, being gracious in his words, and they started to actually have big

conversations about life and depth of life and meaning.

And right when the opportunity came for my friend to share Christ with him, these are his words, he said, I chickened out and I didn't do it.

[ 48 : 32 ] Two days later, his friend died in a car crash. And in tears, my friend told me, I will stand one day and give account that I did not share.

I do not share this to shame us. In fact, when I heard this, I asked him and I tried to build him up, hey, the Lord is good and he is sovereign and I want to encourage you, don't be defeated.

You're doing so much already. You can learn from this and grow from this. And his response to me was such that he said, I pray that we would never consider convenience or comfort as more important than the lost hearing about Jesus.

But what does this mean for our witness? This means that out there right now there are sinners on whom God has set his loving gaze and affection from eternity past. This means that out there right now there are those who have yet to respond to his glorious grace through the gospel.

This means that out there right now are people who God dearly loves and who need to taste and see of the goodness of Jesus. And we are witnesses, brothers and sisters, we have tasted and we have seen.

[ 49 : 47 ] And the reality is this, that every single person you and I interact with on a daily may be someone that God has plans to redeem. Paul tells us that for the foundations of the world, he has chosen his beloved.

So I want to encourage us. Pray with passion. Live wisely. Let your speech be gracious. Trust in God for the growth and for the open doors.

This is winsome witness. We are the ones who witness. God is the one who wins sinners to himself. Let's pray. God, thank you so much for this morning.

Thank you for your word. Thank you that we've seen the beauty of the gospel clearly. Lord, I pray that for any of us in here who maybe have fear over what it means to witness or what the cost may be, would you encourage us and build us up in our faith, Lord?

Lord, I thank you for the spirit that is dwelling within each and every one of us, Lord. That this duty is not up to us alone, but that you strengthen us and you empower us through your spirit that dwells within us to speak the right words, to build the right relationships, to be gracious in every way.

[ 51 : 06 ] God, from what we have received, we know we will be required of much. And we have received much. So, Lord, I pray that as followers of Christ who have been redeemed by this gracious, glorious gospel, that we would pass that along.

We love you, Lord. It's in your name we pray. Amen. Amen.