

Christ for the World

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[0:00] Well, good morning, church. Turn with me and your Bibles to the book of Colossians, Colossians page 984, 985 in the Pew Bibles.

Colossians chapter 4, we're looking at verses 2 through 6 as we've been going through this short but very powerful and wonderful letter of Paul this fall.

And we are nearing the end. So we come to the end of Paul's instructions. Next week will be his closing and greetings. We'll see some of his friendships and the people, his co-workers in ministry.

But today we're looking at the end of his instructions to the church. So let's read Colossians chapter 4, verses 2 through 6.

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.

[1:30] 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.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his letters and papers from prison wrote this. He said, The church is the church only when it exists for others.

Not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell people of every calling what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others. And as long as we're on earth, that's true.

The church is the church only when it exists for others. Now, I think we would all admit the church has often struggled to live out this calling. Bonhoeffer was writing in a time and place where the church, when the church in Germany had become very powerful and very privileged, and as a result, it became self-serving.

It became entangled with the power structures of the day and lost its distinctive witness. Now, in other times and places, the church has been marginalized and powerless and ridiculed, a small minority, and the church has been tempted to simply withdraw in fear from the world.

[3:01] Now, I think we're somewhere in the middle in the United States today. Christianity still has a privileged place in American history. But in certain sectors of society, Christianity is increasingly marginalized.

So I think we can face both temptations. The temptation to compromise with the world, because we want to be accepted by it. And the temptation to withdraw from the world in fear, to make our faith just a private matter.

Something that we do just on Sundays, and we don't tell anyone else about it the rest of the week. Last year, I was talking to another pastor in New Haven, and he said to me, the church is both a family and an army.

And in order to be a healthy church, we need to hold both of those values together. As a church, we're called to be a family. We're called to be a refuge, a place of comfort and healing and community, of personal renewal and growth.

But we're also called to be an army in the sense of a people on the mission to reach the world for Jesus. And to carry out the commission he's given us.

[4:11] So how do we live out this calling, this mission to the world to exist for others? And this morning's passage gives us some very practical instructions about how to do that.

Now before we jump in, let me briefly review what we've seen in Colossians already. Or if you haven't been here, if you're here for the first time, this will sort of overview what we've looked at the last couple of months.

The main idea of Colossians is chapter 2, verse 6. As you receive Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him. Now the first chapter of Colossians is about who is Christ Jesus the Lord, and what does it mean that we have received Him, and been brought into His kingdom, and belong to His family, and the gospel is growing in us.

Chapter 2, starting at verse 8, we see Paul's warnings to the church in Colossae. He warned them, don't be taken captive by people who claim to offer you something better than Jesus.

He says, there's nothing better than what Jesus has to offer you. You don't need to go somewhere else to find something that you can't get from knowing Jesus more deeply and fully.

[5:27] Chapter 3 is Paul's positive instructions. How do we live as people who have died and risen with Christ? And if you've noticed, Paul's instructions go from the inside out.

So chapter 3, verses 1 to 4, he says, set your minds on things above. He starts with our own hearts and minds, and what we're seeking, and where we're directed, where we're focused.

And then verses 5 to 17 of chapter 3, he focuses on the internal life of the Christian community. How we should be putting off sin, and putting on the character of Christ, and how we express that in our community together.

Last week, we looked at verse 18 of chapter 3 to chapter 4, verse 1, which covers the household, which in the ancient world covered, was included both the home and work.

And what does it mean to live in Christ in our home and work settings? And finally, the passage we're looking at today focuses on how do we relate to the outside world?

[6:35] How do we relate to people who are outside of the Christian community, who do not identify as believers in Christ? And the other thing Paul's doing here, as he sort of brings his letter to a close, is he's inviting the Colossian Christians to join in with him.

In chapter 1, Paul began with praying with thanksgiving for the Colossians. And now here in chapter 4, verse 2, he says, join me in praying with thanksgiving, and praying for me.

At the end of chapter 1, Paul spoke about his efforts in deed and word on behalf of the Colossians. And now in verses 5 and 6, he's going to urge them in their walk and talk, in our deed and word, to make efforts to share the gospel with their neighbors.

So this section sort of wraps up the letter in a few different ways. So how do we, as the church of Jesus Christ, how do we exist for others? And Paul gives us two basic commands.

Number one, be devoted in prayer. This is verse 2 to 4. And number two, be deliberate in witness. So that's what we're going to look at this morning. Prayer. You could also call this sermon, Pray, Walk, and Talk.

[7:47] Pray, verses 2 to 4. Walk, verse 5. Talk, verse 6. How do we relate to people outside the church? Those are Paul's three words for us today. So let's jump in.

Verse 2, Paul tells us how to pray. He says three words. Be steadfast, be watchful, and be thankful. So first, be steadfast.

What does that mean? It means to continue in prayer. It's a word that means pray with strength, pray with devotion, pray with endurance, with dedication and discipline.

Jesus said like the persistent widow in the parable, we ought always to pray and not lose heart. We need to keep on praying even when we don't see answers to our prayers yet.

Sam Storms has a book of meditations on the book of Colossians. And he gives a few reasons why God doesn't always answer our prayers immediately.

[8 : 51] Here are a few of them. He says sometimes we're too entitled. And through steadfast prayer, God wants to teach us that everything we receive is a gift.

Sometimes he says we're too impatient. And through steadfast prayer, God wants to teach us patient dependence on him and not instant gratification. Sometimes we're too immature.

We're not yet ready to handle the answers we're asking for. And through steadfast prayer, God prepares us to receive the answers that we're looking for to our prayers.

Sometimes our motives are mixed. And through steadfast prayer, God starts to sort through our motives. Have you ever been praying for something? And then the Holy Spirit sort of starts to check your motives.

And you sort of realize, my motives aren't quite right here. I really want this, but I need to sort those out before the Lord.

[9 : 52] Sometimes God wants to purify our hearts. Sometimes there's a spiritual battle going on that we're not even aware of, like it refers to in the book of Daniel. Sometimes God has his own sovereign reasons that we don't fully understand.

But whatever the situation God's command to us is, be steadfast in prayer. But also, be watchful in prayer. Again, this goes back to the teaching of Jesus.

Jesus taught his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, watch and pray that you may not fall into temptation. Luke 21 for 34, Jesus says, watch yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation, that is distraction and drunkenness and the cares of this life.

And that day, the day when the Son of Man will return, come upon you suddenly like a trap. He says, watch yourselves. Watch and pray.

Now, some Christians have misunderstood this command a little bit. Some Christians have gotten into the habit of watching for signs that supposedly indicate when Jesus will return.

[10 : 59] But that's not what Jesus said. Jesus didn't say, watch for signs and then make guesses about when I'll return. He said, no, you're not going to know. I'm going to comment unexpectedly.

You won't be able to anticipate it. He says, watch yourselves. Sort of like a security guard working the night shift. You know the morning's going to come, but you're to be watchful in the face of potential spiritual dangers in this present evil age.

We're to watch our lives and be in prayer, be watchful in prayer. Prayer helps us remain alive to the will of God and aware of the needs of the world, even as we await the glorious coming of our King.

So be steadfast, be watchful, and third, be thankful in prayer. Paul says, pray with thanksgiving. You know, every once in a while, I've talked with Christians who are pretty persistent in prayer and perhaps watchful.

Maybe they even are up in the middle of the night praying, but they're also anxious and restless. And you know, interestingly, prayer by itself doesn't always seem to make things better.

- [12:17] Sometimes prayer even seems to make that anxiety worse. Because, you know, it's possible for our prayers to become a sort of meditation on our problems. But that's why Paul urges us to pray with thanksgiving.

You see, giving thanks to God is one of the best ways to resist the dominance of anxiety and worry and restlessness and self-pity. Giving thanks to God reminds us of God's faithfulness in the past, and it points us towards God's promises in the future, and in doing so, it lifts us beyond our present circumstances.

So Paul says, pray with steadfastness, pray with watchfulness, and also pray with thankfulness. So that's how we should pray. Now, before I go on to verse three and four, which gives us, which tells us what we should pray for, let me pause for a moment to speak to you.

Perhaps you're not a Christian. Perhaps you're a skeptical or secular person. This week, we're celebrating Thanksgiving, right? We're talking about Thanksgiving here. And at one level, Thanksgiving's a great holiday because everyone can participate, right?

People of all religious faith and none can agree that feeling and expressing gratitude is a good thing. It's one thing that almost all sociologists and psychologists agree.

- [13:43] The practice of gratitude will make for a happier and healthier life. And so we can all take time to honor friends and family by thanking them this week. But I think practicing gratitude also raises a deeper question.

If you're an atheist, if you're an agnostic, or if you believe in a higher power or a distant force rather than the personal and living God of the Bible, let me ask you a question.

Where do you direct your feelings of gratitude aside from other human beings? Who do you thank when you feel overwhelmingly lucky to be alive?

Gifted far beyond anything you've deserved. Rescued from a seemingly impossible predicament. Sustained and nourished in body and mind. Awaken to beauty and love and the mysteries of human life.

Don't all those things make us intuitively want to thank someone? Not only have feelings of gratitude inside that have no object, or feeling grateful to the random variations of the universe.

- [14:57] Don't our feelings of gratitude point us to someone whose wisdom astounds us and whose kindness beckons us. That's who the Bible speaks about.

The Bible speaks about the infinitely wise God who made us for himself. And the Bible says that the kindness of God, the many gifts that all of us receive, whether we recognize them as coming from God or not, the kindness of God leads us toward repentance.

That is towards turning to God. To look beyond ourselves and turn to the God who made us and the God who sent his son to reconcile us to himself so that we may know him as our heavenly father and as the source of every blessing.

So let me challenge you as you celebrate Thanksgiving to consider who are you thankful to? And is the truly fitting object of your gratitude the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ?

Christ. That's what the Bible has to offer. But moving on to verse 3 and 4, for those of us who are believers in Christ, Paul tells us not only how we should pray, but also what we should pray for.

- [16:13] Now verses 3 and 4 are not a comprehensive teaching on Christian prayer. There are many aspects of prayer that are not covered in these verses, but these verses tell us to pray for two things.

Verse 3, Paul says, pray that God would open doors for his word. Now that phrase of God opening things that are previously closed is used in at least three ways in the New Testament.

God opens the door to his kingdom. God opens the door to his family so that people from all nations can come in. So Acts 14.27 says, they declared how God had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

to the nations of the world. But also God opens up opportunities for the gospel message to go out into all the world. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 2.12, when I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, a door was opened for me in the Lord.

Or 1 Corinthians 16, verse 8, I will stay in Ephesus for a wide door for effective work has opened to me. And there are many adversaries. So God opens up opportunities for the gospel to go out and also God opens the hearts of people to respond.

[17:27] Acts 16.14, the Lord opened Lydia's heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. So God opens the door to his kingdom. He's done that in Christ Jesus. God opens up opportunities for the message to go out and God opens up people's hearts and minds so that Christ can come in.

And in all these cases, God is the one who opens doors. Revelation 3.7 describes Jesus as the one who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

And so when Paul prays here that God would open a door for his word, Paul is praying for God to do something that only God can do. And we too should pray earnestly for God to do what only God can do.

To open hearts that are closed and resistant and hardened. To open doors for his word to go forth in places where there are barriers and hindrances and opposition. Now if you've been coming to our adult Sunday school class, you've heard stories about this just this morning and last week.

Last Sunday, Kelechi was teaching and he told about his friend in Nigeria who had a dream two years ago. And this young man felt that in his dream God impressed upon his heart to go to a certain village in one of the most dangerous provinces in Nigeria.

[18:51] The headquarters of Boko Haram which is sort of a violent group felt that God was impressing upon him to go to this village and tell people there about Jesus.

They had never been there before. They prayed about it together and four days later three people got in a car. Kelechi, his friend, another friend, they decided to go.

And as they went they prayed because they realized that this was a very risky venture. They traveled eight hours by car to a place they'd never been before. They arrived at the village at night time.

They met with the village chief who is a devout Muslim and they said, we're just visiting here and we weren't sure if people knew what Christmas was about. It was around Christmas time they were visiting.

We'd like to share with you why Christians celebrate Christmas. And the chief said, sure. I'll get my boys to round everybody up and bring them to my palace and you can talk to them tomorrow.

[19:50] So the next day the chief summons everyone to his palace and they share for hours about why Jesus came into the world and the kind of life he lived and why he died on the cross. They had brought t-shirts with Bible verses in the local tribal language about Jesus as the prince of peace and about that province as a place of peace.

They also talked to the chief about the possibility of opening a health clinic in the village at some point in the future. God opened a door for his word in a very unlikely place.

And now we can pray that God would continue to open doors for his word in that village. That it would grow and bear fruit. So we should pray that God would open doors for his word.

But the second thing Paul tells us to pray for is to pray that Christian missionaries and preachers would proclaim Christ with power and clarity.

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. So Paul says pray that God would do what only God can do that he would open the doors that no one else can open or shut once he opens them.

[21 : 07] But Paul also says pray that God would enable me to carry out the responsibility that God has given to me. Now on a side note if Paul asked people to pray for him we shouldn't be above asking people to pray for us.

Occasionally I talk with Christians who almost seem to almost never ask anyone else to pray for them. You say can I pray for you? And they say no don't pray for me pray for somebody else.

But you know what? Paul knew that God often chooses to work through the prayers of his people. And so we should ask others to pray that God would give us the strength to carry out the responsibilities he has set before us.

All of us need that. Need others to pray that God would help us to be faithful in the mission he's given to each of us. That we'd have the courage and wisdom and power and love to fulfill all responsibilities before God.

Now Paul's responsibility was to preach the gospel and to go to new places and begin churches. As he says in verse 3 to declare the mystery of Christ.

[22 : 19] Now the mystery of Christ is simply the gospel of Christ. Romans 16 25 Paul describes the gospel as the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed to all nations.

And in Colossians 2 verse 2 Paul says God's mystery is Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. So when Paul talks about the mystery of Christ he's simply referring to it as something that had been hidden in the past in the Old Testament before Jesus came and now the curtain has been opened.

In Jesus coming to earth in his life in his death in his resurrection in his ascension to glory the heavenly curtain has been drawn back and now the whole world can see God's plan.

God's plan to reconcile sinful people to himself by his grace and God's plan to renew all of his creation for his glory. Now Paul's role and every Christian preacher's role is simply to make that gospel known to make it clear to preach it true truly as it is and not to mix it up with other things.

One writer said the gospel is a summons to faith and obedience. It is an offer of reconciliation and peace with God. It is a warning of judgment to those who continue in sin and it is a gift of hope in a world that is brutal cold and dark.

[23 : 54] So we should pray that missionaries and preachers and evangelists throughout the world would make the gospel clear in all these ways as a summons as an offer as a warning and as a gift of hope.

We should pray that through as the gospels preach that people would see Jesus in his glory and be drawn to him across all the barriers across cultural barriers across language barriers across intellectual barriers above the noise of all the distractions that clutter our modern world.

We should pray particularly for believers who are suffering like Paul was. Paul mentions here he's in prison or at least literally that means bound.

He was probably under house arrest on account of the gospel. Now at some times Paul did ask other Christians to pray for his release.

Philippians 1.19 Paul encourages the Philippian Christians to continue praying for his deliverance. But here in Colossians Paul's prayer is not that God would open the door so that I can go free ASAP.

[25:10] No, Paul's primary concern is that God would open a door for his word. And Paul knows that even if he's sitting there under house arrest chained to a guard that they're still letting him have visitors.

And so the gospel and they're still letting him write letters. And so the gospel's going forward even through his imprisonment. That's actually the last word of the book of Acts.

The last sentence of the book of Acts says Paul was under house arrest and it says he proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ boldly and unhindered.

The word of even though Paul was confined the word of God was going forth and Paul could rejoice in that. And Paul was released from that imprisonment we think.

The New Testament doesn't give us the chronology of that but as we put some things together it seems most likely that Paul was released from that particular imprisonment. He was able to go and travel and preach the gospel in other places again.

[26:20] But regardless we should pray for Christians who like Paul are persecuted. Who are pray for the persecuted church around the world that they would be relieved and comforted and released but also pray that they would be emboldened and empowered and encouraged like Paul.

Now there's lots of opportunities that we have right here at Trinity to be reminded to pray for the church around the world. If you just go downstairs in the fellowship hall there's a bulletin board on the wall. It's just been nicely redone.

It's called Trinity Around the World and you can see some of the ministries that we support and pray for throughout the world. In the month of December we'll be highlighting some of our global ministry partners in the bulletin each week so you can take your bulletin home with you and pray for them.

We'll also be continuing our adult Sunday school. Next week we're not having Sunday school just the morning service at 10 but again once December comes we have three more weeks of our global missions Sunday school class at 9 o'clock.

You can join the prayer email list email Michelle call the office so you can receive email updates from the ministry partners we support as a church. There's all kinds of ways.

[27:36] We'll be having some people visit Joseph and Michelle coming we'll be visiting in a few weeks in December to share about their ministry. So let me just encourage you to take advantage of these opportunities to be reminded to pray for the church around the world and to remember that what God is doing is much bigger than what's going on in our individual lives or even in this local church but to pray as Paul encouraged the Colossians to pray for the work of God throughout the world.

We've tried to start doing this with our kids with one or two of the families that they have met who have been part of this church who are now serving in other parts of the world and so we try to pray for those missionaries maybe once a week or at least every so often when we pray together at night to pray specifically for them and our kids pray for them.

So let's find ways to be doing that and remembering that together. So that's Paul's first command be devoted in prayer for the church around the world but Paul's second command in verse 5 and 6 is not only be devoted in prayer for the church in other parts of the world but also be deliberate in witness to your neighbors next door.

Verse 6 this is the walk and talk part. You see the gospel the point is that the gospel of Jesus does not only go forth through missionaries and preachers and traveling evangelists like Paul.

The gospel goes forth through the walk and talk of ordinary followers of Jesus. In verses 2 to 4 prayer supports the church's mission of proclaiming the gospel abroad and verses 5 and 6 wise living supports the church's mission of spreading the gospel at home.

[29 : 31] So let's look at verse 5 about our walk and then we'll get to verse 6 about our talk. Verse 5 walk in wisdom toward outsiders making the best use of the time.

Now when Paul talks about our walk he's talking about our pattern of life our attitude our behavior and notice that when Paul gives instructions here about sharing our faith with people outside the church he begins with our walk.

Bonhoeffer said the church must not underestimate the importance of human example. It is not abstract argument but example that gives its word emphasis and power.

I mean think about it this way. What was Jesus' primary goal in coming to earth? Well most of us would say something like to die on the cross for our sins. That's certainly very central to why Jesus came.

But if Jesus' primary goal in coming to earth was to offer his life as a sacrifice for us why did he spend 33 years obeying his parents working as a carpenter teaching the crowds healing the sick casting out demons instructing his disciples praying to his father?

[30 : 48] Well one reason is because Jesus' life and example matters. We see from the way Jesus lived that he is uniquely qualified to be our savior.

We see that he's utterly wise and fully trustworthy. We see that he's a merciful and faithful high priest who has been tempted in every way just as we are yet without sin so we can approach him with confidence.

You see Jesus' walk matters and our walk matters too. Someone said we are the only Bible that some people will ever read.

what does it mean to walk in wisdom? Well John Piper described wisdom as knowing what to do for the glory of God when the rule book runs out.

Knowing how to become all things to all people without compromising holiness and truth. Creativity and tact and thoughtfulness.

[31 : 48] It's a good picture of biblical wisdom. It's not just following the rules but it's seeking to live out the mission that God has given us.

Seeking to live out the live according to the character that God is developing in us. And Piper went on to say there are four sources of wisdom.

Four ways we can grow in wisdom. First, meditating on scripture. Psalm 19 7 says the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

That word simple means those who are naive. And the word of God can help us grow and become wise. Especially as we meditate on it. Not just read it quickly and forget about it but chew on it.

Maybe that means write a verse down and repeat it and read the same verse for a week so that it gets into us. Prayer.

[32 : 51] James 1 5, if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God. Prayer is a source of wisdom. Listening to wise counselors, Proverbs 19 20, listen to advice and accept instruction and at the end you'll be counted among the wise.

Fourth, constant practice. Hebrews 5 14 says that mature Christians have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil by constant use of God's word.

That is by obeying biblical commands and applying biblical principles day by day just like an athlete trains for the game by constantly daily practicing the principles that they've learned from their coach.

church. So meditating on scripture, praying, listening to wise counselors and seeking out wise counsel and constant practice, those are ways that we can grow in wisdom.

And Paul says walk in wisdom. All right, the question is does your walk increasingly reflect the wisdom of God in your interactions with people outside the church?

[33 : 58] can people who are not Christians look at your life and see not perfection and not someone pretending that they have it all together when they don't?

Because none of us will be perfect and so we shouldn't try to pretend that we are. But can people see sincerity and can they see growth over time?

That's what Paul is challenging us to. To walk and to be growing in wisdom. He also says making the best use of the time.

Think about how do you use your time. The best use of our time requires intentionality. Not just going with the flow, not just doing whatever you feel like doing in the moment. Now that doesn't mean you have to be type A and have every hour of your life scheduled three weeks in advance and never be spontaneous.

Right? Type A people have our own problems. We know that. Even Jesus accepted interruptions from people. It's a good example for us to follow.

[35 : 06] But it does mean that the time we have on earth is short and we ought to use it well in light of eternity. You see, the way we use our time is ultimately a reflection of our priorities.

priorities. And the Bible says that our priorities ought to be shaped by eternal realities. You know, Paul wrote this letter to the church in Colossae and just a few months or at most a few years after they would have received this letter, the entire city was decimated by an earthquake.

The time was short and they probably had no idea how short it was. Here's a question for us. If your life were unexpectedly cut short tomorrow, would you have regrets about how you were using your time today?

Are there things that God has commanded you to do that you are procrastinating on or delaying? Are there words of comfort, repentance, forgiveness, that you need to speak to someone else and not keep delaying?

Paul says, make the best use of the time because the time is short and we will never know how short it might be. But if verse five focuses on our walk, verse six focuses on our talk.

[36 : 49] Now, there's a quotation that is frequently repeated and it's almost always attributed to St. Francis of Assisi that says, preach the gospel always when necessary use words.

There are at least two problems with this quotation. First, St. Francis never said it. Okay? Don't say that somebody said something when they didn't because you wouldn't want someone saying that about you after you die.

In fact, St. Francis preached a lot, sometimes up to five times in a day, so he didn't even live according to this principle. Second, in order to proclaim the gospel of Jesus, words are necessary in some form or other, whether it's written down or whether it's spoken.

Now, Paul, a better quotation is this, a godly walk must be accompanied by godly talk. They have to go together. That's why Paul is talking about our walk in verse five, and in some ways that's foundational, but talk in verse six needs to go along with it.

Now, Paul is not saying that all of us must stand up in front of groups of people and give speeches. No, but what he does say here is that our talk matters.

[38 : 10] Our conversations matter. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer each one. Now, Paul's assumption here is that Christians will regularly be in conversation with people who do not identify as believers in Christ.

Right? Earlier in Colossians, Paul warned the Colossians. He said, don't be led astray by deceptive philosophies. But here we see very clearly that Paul's warning not to be led astray by false teachers does not mean that Christians should disengage and withdraw from all of our relationships with people who don't identify as Christians.

No. We should be engaged in ongoing relationship and conversation. That's a basic assumption. Paul doesn't even need to say it.

It's the assumption behind what he's saying. And in fact, Paul's instructions about how we should speak to one another inside the church in chapter 3 are quite similar to his instructions here about how to speak with people outside the church.

So, if you look at chapter 3 verse 12, Paul says, put on kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. And then here in chapter 4 verse 6, he says, let your speech always be gracious.

[39 : 26] Chapter 3 verse 16, again, within the church, we should be teaching and admonishing one another. And that corresponds in chapter 4 verse 6, let your speech be seasoned with salt.

Right? So, there's a parallel. Right? There shouldn't be a huge difference between how we speak to one another inside the church and how we converse with people outside the church. We shouldn't only ever talk about anything spiritual with only other Christians and never even mention to anyone else that we even go to church.

No, there should be a wholeness to our life. Right? Christians are not supposed to be schizophrenic and sort of multiple personalities in multiple places. No. No. Our life is supposed to be integrated and whole and truthful wherever we are.

And we shouldn't be putting on a show in front of other Christians when we're not living honestly in the world.

Right? There needs to be a unity here. The only difference I can find is Paul does not say that we should sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to our non-believing neighbors. Okay?

[40 : 42] Probably in most contexts that would be weird to go up to your non-Christian neighbor and start singing one of the songs that we sang this morning.

They'd probably think you're a little odd. And Paul's saying, no, you don't need to be odd. You don't need to be deliberately weird. But here in verse 6, what we do see is a picture of how ordinary non-weird conversations can unfold in a way that leads to opportunities to share about Christ.

Let your speech always be gracious. What does that word mean? It means overflowing with God's grace. Attractive, gentle, kind, not harsh, not overbearing. Gracious talk as well as gracious listening, because James says we should be quick to listen and not just to speak.

Gracious talk as well as gracious listening is a testimony to the grace and kindness that we have received from God. Someone said people don't care how much you know until they know that you care.

So let your speech always be gracious. But second, our talk is to be seasoned with salt. Now, what does that mean? Well, think about the difference that salt makes. It adds flavor to a meal.

[42 : 01] It stimulates appetite. It makes you want more. In the ancient world, salt was also a preservative, even today, right? If you have sausages, right? They're probably preserved with salt and some other things that prevent the meat from spoiling.

So Paul's saying our talk shouldn't just be sweet and inoffensive, never challenging the status quo, never confronting anyone, never taking any risks. No, our talk also needs to be salty.

It needs to be sweet and gracious, but it also needs to be salty and provocative. You know, invite someone to come to the Christmas carol service with you. Really?

What do you have to lose? They might even say yes. Look for connections between biblical truths and ordinary conversations.

And point them out sometimes. Learn to ask thought-provoking questions like Jesus did. Look at all the questions. Read through one of the Gospels and look at all the questions Jesus asks.

[43 : 01] He asks people a lot of thought-provoking questions. And we can ask questions like, what are the things you value most in life? Sincere questions that help us get to know someone else and get to know what are some of their core concerns?

What's your spiritual background? Or maybe even who do you think Jesus was? Or where are you with God in relationship to God if someone is there?

Or even this question. If you were to die tonight and stand before God and God were to say, why should I let you into heaven? How would you respond? God? Now, that's probably not the most helpful question to ask an atheist, right?

Because they would say, well, I don't believe in God at all. But if someone comes from a nominally Christian background, that's actually a really helpful question to ask because it's really asking, what are you depending on for your salvation and for being right with God?

those are just some examples. But think of your own, right? What questions can you ask people that will offer an opportunity for the conversation to go deeper?

[44 : 16] But you know, the only way that our talk will really be both gracious and seasoned with salt is if we are resting in the grace of Jesus and if we are savoring Him.

If we've tasted and seen that He's good and we want more of Him because you know what? You can't give what you don't have. And so if you're a miserable Christian, you're not going to be able to share it very well.

If you're angry at God, you need to deal with being angry and bitter with God before you try to go share the gospel with somebody else. Although God can sometimes draw a straight line with a crooked stick, as they say.

But if you're not desiring more of Jesus, start there. Because someone who's hungry for more of Jesus and who's finding satisfaction in Jesus, it'll overflow naturally.

You might not even need this passage. It'll just start coming out of you. You might sometimes need some wisdom and discernment, but that's another sermon for another day.

[45 : 28] Finally, verse 6 ends with this, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. I mean, I think that this verse almost gives a picture of sort of a relationship or a conversation that progresses, right?

Someone sees your walk, you're growing in wisdom, your speech is gracious, you're building a relationship, your speech is seasoned with salt, you ask provocative questions, and then eventually someone asks you a question or they say, you know, I want to know more or, sure, I'll come with you to church.

I sort of want to see what it's all about. And then you'll have an opportunity to answer. And as 1 Peter 3, 15 says, you'll have an opportunity to give a reason for the hope that we have in Christ and to do this with gentleness and respect.

You see, in verses 5 and 6, we see a picture of how the gospel of Jesus goes forth, not only by preachers, not only by missionaries, not only by famous Christians like Paul, but they're ordinary people in one-to-one conversations, in, through ordinary Christian believers who walk in wisdom and whose talk is gracious and salty.

so brothers and sisters, pray, walk, talk, because the church is a church only when it exists for others. Let's pray.

[46 : 58] Lord, we pray that you would help us to be people of prayer, people who pray with steadfastness and watchfulness and thankfulness. We pray for open doors for the gospel people, in other parts of the world, especially where there are hindrances.

churches, but we pray also that your word would go forth through us. Lord, we pray that each of us would be growing in our walk and in wisdom as we meditate on your word and pray and seek out wise counsel and seek to constantly practice.

Lord, we pray that our speech, our talk, would be gracious and it would be salty, that our speech would be truthful and sincere.

And we pray that many would come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. In his name we pray. Amen.