**Speak Up!**

**Colossians 4:2-6 (ESV)**

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Today we’re going to take a break from the book of Romans. As I’ve been thinking and praying about where we might spend our time, the Lord has been convicting me and drawing me back to Colossians chapter 4.

***2*** *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.* ***3*** *At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—****4*** *that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.*

***5*** *Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.* ***6*** *Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*

August 27, 1883 produced one of the loudest sounds ever heard. It came from a small Indonesian island called Krakatoa. Around 10am that morning, a volcano erupted. It tore the island apart and sent a plume of smoke 17 miles high at nearly half a mile per second, and created a tsunami wave over 100 feet. The sound it produced was heard from 3,000 miles away. To cover that distance, it takes noise about 4 hours. One article says, “That’s like standing in Boston and hearing a noise from Dublin, Ireland.” The sound was so loud, sailors 40 miles away had their eardrums ruptured. By the time the sound reached Europe, it was no longer noticeable to the human ear, but weather barometers continued to measure vibrations for 5 days as it circled the earth another 4 times.

When Jesus returned to heaven, he left a group of followers so few in number they could have easily gone unnoticed, if it weren’t for the explosion. This small group was waiting and praying in a room as Jesus commanded, and the Day of Pentecost arrived. God unleashed a celestial airstrike; a noise from heaven like a mighty rushing wind. Tongues of fire appeared and rested upon each of them. They were filled with God’s Spirit so powerfully, that for the first time in history, the linguistic confusion of Babel was temporarily reversed, and they began to sound forth the message of God’s mighty works in every language present. Peter burst forth with words about Jesus’ death and resurrection for the salvation of sinners with such conviction and boldness that 3,000 people converted on the spot. The rest, as they say, is history.

This small ragtag band of apostles led a revolution that would reshape the world. This was an explosive message; good news, the power of God unto salvation. It was an unprecedented spiritual eruption that ricocheted from person to person, town to town, from nation to nation. It is one message about one man to save the world. The gospel! This news was carried by Christ’s apostles and spread by His followers. In particular, a man named Paul, whose boldness and pace of travel went unmatched. The book of Acts recounts his exploits and the spread of the gospel through Asia Minor. The movement grew through Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and beyond. Churches on mission, even further than Paul had traveled. He said to one church, Thessalonica,

**1 Thessalonians 1:8** For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.

Through Jesus’ apostles and these converts, the Word of God spread. But boldness like this does not go unnoticed. Eventually, Paul faced such severe opposition that he was enchained and sent to prison. And from the bonds of imprisonment, he continued the spread of the message. Even captured behind enemy lines, as it were, he found ways to smuggle the Word of Jesus to other followers, to carry it forward.

One of these parchment letters was sent to a tiny church in the town of Colossae. It was a congregation Paul had probably never visited, but was likely planted by one of his fellow workers, a man named Epaphras. Paul had heard from him a mixed report about this church, and so he returns word with a letter. It is a message to which we turn today. It’s a note to a church facing opposition, lies about Jesus, pressure to conform to religious rules in the absence of Him. And Paul reinforces the message that had, and continues to sound forth through the power of God’s Spirit, that you don’t need all that stuff. Jesus is enough! He’s sufficient! He’s everything!

It’s a radical message of transforming hope that the world is committed to stifle, but God is determined to spread. So much so, that at the end of the letter, before he ends, he presses the church toward a final call to mission. It’s a last appeal to spread this news about Jesus. Because Paul knows the opposition will be stiff. The temptation to go silent, to soften the message, to clam up, is ever present. And he pleads with them to keep the signal going and the volume turned up. The message must go on.

Today we gather, indebted to generations of men and women who have gone before us for thousands of years, faithfully sharing this news as it circles the globe. We’re just one more church body through which God desires to sound forth this hope to a dying world in desperate need. And the temptation to go soft remains. Speaking this message is costly. It definitely means discomfort. It probably means ridicule. It could cost business. It often invites persecution. It’s known to divide families. It will certainly lose you some friends. It’s costs like these that threaten our church with the temptation to soften the volume of our output. But the stakes are clear. To lower our voice in fear will eradicate our influence and doom us to impotence.

Where do we stand today? Let’s do a sound check. What sort of impact does Bethany Baptist Church have? What sort of noise goes forth from our body? How do we maximize our impact for the glory of God in the world around us? If we’re to carry forth God’s Word, we need to be faithful to speak up. The passage is clear. Silence is not an option. To maximize our impact, we need to turn up the volume and keep it going.

What does that look like? Verses 2 through 6 present two volume outputs, two basic communication channels, or speakers through which the message of God sounds forth. Output # 1 is vertical. Output # 2 is horizontal. Both are essential. Our vertical volume is prayer; the horizontal is witness. If we are to maximize our impact the way God desires, we have no option but to speak up. Or, as many have put it before, we need to commit to talk with God about people and talk with people about God. These are two outputs for us to sound check individually and corporately; our prayer and witness.

**Output #1—Speak Up Vertically [Prayer] (4:2-4)**

We need to speak up vertically through prayer; talking to God about people. What is the quality of our prayer? That’s a hard question to answer. So in this context, here are four qualities of powerful prayer for you to test your life against. In verses 3 and 4, Paul is going to discuss what to pray for, the matter of prayer. But first in verse 2, he begins with how to pray, or the manner of prayer, what we should pray like. So let’s begin with how to pray. There are four qualities.

**Quality #1 Ongoing Devotion: Pray Continually (4:2a)**

First, prayer is marked by ongoing devotion. God wants us to pray continually, to press on. In verse 2 Paul tells the church

***2*** *Continue steadfastly in prayer…*

The closing words, as is his custom in several other letters, are about prayer. This is a command to obey. Pray. It is continual, steadfast, ongoing prayer. It’s a quality of devotion to which Paul’s own example bears witness. In the first chapter of this letter, Colossians 1:9, Paul says

**Colossians 1:9** And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you…

It’s steadfast prayer that other letters reinforce. He says

**Romans 12:12** …be constant in prayer.

**1 Thessalonians 5:17** pray without ceasing,

It’s continual devotion. This is a practice that Paul didn’t invent. It was a rhythm of life he learned from countless other spiritual leaders before him, from Moses to Samuel to Daniel to Nehemiah. It is steadfast, nonstop, diligent, persevering, enduring, unwearied, continual, ongoing prayer. Not infrequent. Not occasional. Steadfast! Before and after the Spirit descended and the church began, this is what they did. They devoted themselves to prayer. Paul does not mean a relentless babbling like some sort of constant audible mantra. In fact, specifically, Jesus warned against that that kind of ritualistic repetitive prayer in Matthew 6. He said

**Matthew 6:7–8** And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

The devotion God desires is different than incessant pagan chanting. He doesn’t want mindless murmuring designed to appease some unwilling ignorant deity. God is a loving Father who knows our every need. So this constant prayer looks different. It’s a shift from ritual to relationship, ongoing relationship. It is being God-conscious and aware of His presence, and God is never fully absent from your thoughts. You’re God-ward in your living. One pastor writes, “There should run through all our lives the music of that continual prayer, heard beneath our varying occupations like some prolonged deep bass note that bears up and gives dignity to the lighter melody that rises and falls and changes above it.” There’s a sense in which our prayers should possess an ongoing rhythm, almost like breathing, because by it, we’re sustained. Steadfast prayer!

One pastor speaks of it like mining. Creating these shafts meant a twofold method. The first would be a longer step, to bore a deep hole into the hard rock. It’s “work that takes patience, steadiness, and a great deal of skill.” But after the holes are dug, you insert a shot and connect it to a fuse. To light the fuse and fire the shot is not only easy but very interesting. You see results. Shots resound and pieces fly in every direction. But his point is “the more painstaking work requires both skill and patient strength of character.” Anyone can light a fuse.

There will be those prayers where it’s like an explosion, yes, but often, it’s because the deep drilling of steadfast prayer has been done long before. Another pastor says that mature believers know that part of what makes for effective prayers is handling that tedium. Sometimes we think that we can jump right into a prayer and overcome years of silence with one pious appeal. But that’s not the devotion that God is after. Think about this example from Nehemiah.

Nehemiah was a cupbearer before the king, in exile, separated from his homeland. He hears the news that the wall of Jerusalem, chapter 1, is broken down. Gates were destroyed by fire. And it breaks him. He weeps and he mourns for days. And he fasts and prays to God and appeals day and night. Then in chapter 2, he stands before the king, later on. He takes wine, but he’s sad. The king notices.

**Nehemiah 2:1–5** In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. And the king said to me, “Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart.” Then I was very much afraid. I said to the king, “Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” Then the king said to me, “What are you requesting?” So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king…

In that moment, he sends up a flare, a prayer to God. But the hole has been dug long before. And he speaks to the king and asks for favor to go and rebuild the wall, and it’s unleashed, God’s work. Sometimes the effect that happens has already been labored for long before. Steadfast devotion! Maximum impact only happens when our prayer is ongoing.

And if anyone should be exempt from this kind of devoted prayer, it should be the Son of God, yet this is exactly what He exemplifies. He is a man who walked early in the morning and late at night. He spoke with God to the high priestly petition of John 17. Jesus was a man of prayer and ongoing devotion that He encourages through parables like Luke 18, the persistent widow. He tells us to always pray, not lose heart, be constant, steadfast, and devoted in prayer. This is how God desires to work, so pray continually. Be steadfast!

How is the rhythm of our prayer going? As a congregation or as elders or as parents, as families, as children? What attitudes or mindsets, distractions keep us from prayer? What programs or personalities would we rely on instead of prayer? And may God encourage those who have been laboring to not give up, to not quit! Be ongoing!

**Quality #2 Intense Vigilance: Pray Tenaciously (4:2b)**

***2*** *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it…*

Americans have enjoyed such times of peace, that it’s hard to understand this sort of wartime mentality. But there are occasions when it’s thrust upon us. One became too real just a few months ago, on the Island of Hawaii. It was a place of peace and comfort until 8:07 AM, when a text alert flashed on phones: “Ballistic missile threat inbound to Hawaii. Seek immediate shelter. This is not a drill.” 38 minutes later it was revealed to be a mistake. But in that half hour, the island was thrust into a heightened state of awareness and vigilance. It changed what people were doing, how they were thinking, and certainly, how they were praying.

It’s this sort of watchful, on guard, alert, wartime mentality that Paul is exhorting.

Like a soldier on guard at the front lines, studying the landscape as enemies attempt to sneak by undetected. It’s the opposite of routine; of vague, general, non-specific, mindless, boring, rote, dull prayers. This is not the nonchalance of laxity and indifference. This is focused, awake, sharp concentration. It’s watchfulness that affects what you talk about. It affects, at times, when you sleep, how you eat, and what you wear, even. It’s why soldiers don’t wear sandals.

Before an Olympic performance, athletes are aware of how much sleep they’re getting and the kind of fuel they’re taking in, because they’re on high alert. Intense vigilance! This is the watchfulness that Jesus was talking about. In Matthew 25 He told the parable of the virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Some were unprepared and fell asleep. They weren’t ready. And Jesus said

**Matthew 25:13** Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

There’s an alertness. Jesus says

**Mark 13:33** Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come.

Paul carries this forward, especially in the spiritual realm. In Ephesians 6 he says

**Ephesians 6:10–12** Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

And that’s why verse 18 says

**Ephesians 6:18** praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance…

This is war! This is intensity! And it’s the kind of intensity Epaphras lived out in Colossians 4. Look down at verse 12.

**Colossians 4:12** Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

He’s wrestling for them. It’s an intensity that Peter mentions in 1 Peter 4:7.

**1 Peter 4:7** The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

Where would Peter get that idea? Think back to Matthew 26. Jesus is about to be betrayed. Peter thought he was in wartime mentality.

**Matthew 26:33** Peter answered him, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.”

He had great zeal. And yet, when they go to the Garden of Gethsemane, sleep overtakes him. Jesus understands what’s about to happen, but Peter doesn’t understand the spiritual reality. And so he’s sleeping. And Jesus pleads with God. And He asks Peter, “Can you stay awake?” Three times He goes back and they’re still asleep. And it took Peter time before he learned what was to come. Jesus understood what it was, and He encourages us to think with that mindset and pray with intensity.

How watchful are we in our prayers? Are we awake to the warfare around us? What lulls us to sleep or what tactics does the enemy use in our lives to soothe our flesh into dull, general, sleepy prayers? How do we stay alert?

**Quality #3 Mindful Appreciation: Pray Gratefully (4:2c)**

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

Prayer is not just about asking. In fact, as one has said, prayers without thanksgiving are like birds without wings. They don’t fly. They don’t get anywhere. We can’t be so consumed with pining ahead for what God might do, that we fail to look back at what He has done. The balance of the Psalms is full of petition, yes, but also of praise. There are plenty of requests, but not without rejoicing.

A child’s relationship with their parents matures. They begin merely crying for needs, and then they ask for wants, and eventually, they express thankfulness for all that’s been done…hopefully, right? Imagine the kid on Christmas day with stacks of presents unopened. And yet, one look at his sister’s stash, and he begins crying for more. He’s missing the joy of the gift. It’s not just the property, but the relationship.

Without thankfulness, true love goes un-enjoyed, and the goal of the gifts is unmet. So the parents might hold off on giving more gifts until the child enjoys what is intended—gratitude. The love is the secret to greater happiness. It’s not more gifts, but more gratitude; not greater accumulation, but appreciation. The aim of the love. I was sad for that unthankful boy. And if you ask my parents, you will find that child was me. And you know what? When I examine my prayers, I wonder how much has really changed.

Mindful appreciation is the gratitude Paul modeled. All of his letters but one open with this sort of thanksgiving. In Colossians, it’s at least five times. And you might say, “I don’t have much to be thankful for.” But look at Paul. Here is a man in prison. And how does he open? With thankfulness! He’s been falsely accused, brutally beaten, wrongly imprisoned, and yet thankful. Maximum impact prayer is mindful. What robs us of gratefulness and tempts us to grumble and complain? Take a step toward giving thanks and singing out with thankful appreciation.

**Quality #4 Driven Mission: Pray Strategically (4:3, 4)**

Verse 2 was the manner of prayer, how to pray, what we pray like. Now we turn to the matter of prayer, what to pray about or what we pray for. Paul wants us to pray strategically. For him, that means outreach. It is continuing the mission to send forth the message.

Life is full of distractions, and Paul’s strategy is focused. He wants people to come to know Jesus. He knows strategy is a hard thing. It means prioritizing despite those distractions, to achieve a goal. The mission is to win the war, but skirmishes and battles and bullets draw our attention away from where it’s most needed. Like someone once said, “When you're up to your neck in alligators, it's difficult to keep your mind on the fact that your primary objective is to drain the swamp.”

Paul is in prison. It would be easy to be complaining and focus his request on this

alligator. “Get me out of prison!” But he realizes that he’s there because the world is full of God’s enemies. And there’s the war. There’s the swamp to address. Like a true leader, his requests are more strategic. At the close, look at the requests he makes, petitions that reveal his heart, and that we can learn from.

Request # 1 Gospel Opportunity (4:3a)

This is what quality prayer is driven for.

***3*** *At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ*

He asks for an open door to get the Word through. It’s a common picture for evangelism. It’s a chance to sound forth this message, for faith to take hold even if times are tough. Early on in Acts, this is what the church gathered together and declared.

**Acts 14:27** And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

In 1 Corinthians 16:9, Paul says

**1 Corinthians 16:9** for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

This is God allowing the Word to go forth. It’s an amazing metaphor for a man in prison. But that’s his commitment to strategy. He’s driven for mission. He’s a part of the Gospel going forward. It doesn’t mean that he has a martyr complex and he doesn’t care about what happens. He prays for deliverance at other times.

**Romans 15:30–32** I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.

**Philemon 22** At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.

**Philippians 1:19** for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance,

He requests that at times. But here, what’s most strategic and pressing on his heart is an open door for the Word, an opportunity for the Gospel to sound forth. It’s the mystery of Christ. “Mystery” means that only God can reveal it. It’s the mystery that *is* Christ. That was his mission. And as an apostle, he viewed himself

**1 Corinthians 4:1** This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

Back in Colossians 1, Paul says his mission is this stewardship from God to make the Word fully known. And he says

**Colossians 1:26–27** the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

This is his prayer.

**Colossians 2:2–3** that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

And to do that requires bravery.

Request # 2 Gospel Bravery (4:3b)

***3*** *…on account of which I am in prison*

It requires courage and boldness. This is the same Gospel mystery that Paul speaks of in Ephesians chapter 6 in that wartime mentality.

**Ephesians 6:18–20** praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

This is how the church began; with bold speaking. Even with persecution, “we must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). And Paul wrote at the end of Acts,

**Acts 28:31** proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

Even in prison, without hindrance. How does that happen? Here’s where the boldness comes from. In 2 Timothy 2:9 Paul says

**2 Timothy 2:9** for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!

Here’s the thing. You pray for me to be released from prison, I can get out, and then I can be put back. You pray for me to be healed, you pray for me to come back from the dead, I can be killed again like Lazarus. But let me tell you what is never bound. You cannot chain the Word of God. Pray for that to go forth. It can’t be stopped! This is a tremendous source of bravery. And he prays for clarity.

Request # 3 Gospel Clarity (4:4)

This mission is driven for opportunity by bravery toward clarity of the Gospel. Pray for us…

***4*** *that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.*

This is a stewardship that he carried on. It was not with human eloquence, he would say in 1 Corinthians 2.

**1 Corinthians 2:4–5** and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

That’s his request. And did God bless those prayers? Absolutely! During this time, he wrote Colossians. He wrote Ephesians. He wrote Philippians. He wrote Philemon. And not only that, in Philippians chapter 1, he said

**Philippians 1:12–14** I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

And so at the end of the letter,

**Philippians 4:22** All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household.

And God is smiling. The Word is going forth. Prayer must be driven toward the mission. What distractions pull us away from that and cause us to drift? What blinds us to opportunities or intimidates us into cowardice or blurs and waters down our clarity? Our prayers should be driven.

That’s the first output to sound check. Prayer; vertical volume. Verses 2-4. How are we talking with God about people? But if we’re to maximize our impact, it must move us to talk with people about God. Prayer will move us to witness.

**Output #2—Speak Up Horizontally [Witness] (4:5-6)**

Praise God for people in our church committed to this work; for the missionaries on the field, for local outreach workers, for faithful members sharing the gospel. In verses 5 and 6 we see Paul’s heart. We’ll draw out six qualities here to sound test the volume of our speech against.

**Quality #1 An All In Lifestyle: Witness Credibly (4:5a)**

***5*** *Walk in wisdom…*

This is the basis upon which we witness, the foundation, our lifestyle. It’s how we walk. It’s not just our talk, but what we do. The message takes hold when people see us as all in and credible in how we live. It means in wisdom, well, according to God’s Word. It’s not foolishly and fleshly living. It’s keeping in step with this good news and showing that what we say about lives changing is true of us. It’s the power of credibility. Certainly there is a time to speak, and the rest of the verses deal with that. But we need to know that some of our witness is about how we live. How we drive. What we say when we’re out and about. How we work.

During my time in California I was a server at a restaurant. I served a couple with a young child on a busy Saturday evening. In the busyness we didn’t talk too much. But the next morning, I’m in church and I’m teaching a class and they walk in. We were surprised to see each other. And in that moment, I rewound. How did I do serving? And I’m sure they rewound. How much did we tip that guy? (Laughter!) We never know who is watching and what’s happening. There are times when it’s appropriate to be silent, to be living wisely. Jesus told us

**Matthew 10:16** Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

There’s a sense in which a snake on the road knows how to stay out of the way and a dove knows how to appear harmless. There’s a need to not foolishly give a chance or cause for others to attack, and we can witness by our lifestyle. And when the moment comes and it’s opportune, we can speak. Paul knew and understood that. But he understood here that the basis of our witness must be an all in lifestyle.

There were some churches in Africa that we would go and attend. They would play the music so loud, and the message. We asked “why?” Well, they were witnessing to their neighbors so that they would have to hear the music and the message. The entire village heard it. That’s one strategy for evangelism. It wasn’t working too well. An older pastor from the area essentially said the problem was not the volume of the concert, but of their conduct. The congregation needed to shine in the community as wise. Blasting music is one way to witness; obedient living is another. It’s an all in, credible lifestyle. What do we do that challenges our credibility? What do we do in our walk, that challenges our talk? How is our language and attitude at work? Online? On the road? How do we walk it out?

Now it certainly doesn’t stop there. Our witness must be marked by

**Quality #2 An Outgoing Mindset: Witness Proactively (4:5b)**

Now we turn from the foundation of the witness, to it’s direction; to the recipients to whom we witness.

***5*** *Walk in wisdom toward outsiders,…*

We adorn the wisdom and beauty of God to those who are not of the faith, that they would be drawn in. It’s a term Jesus used and Paul used. It’s not a part of this local body. Our witness is to be toward these outsiders. But that means that there must be some element of our mindset that is outgoing. Not necessarily in personality, but in direction. We need to understand a “toward” mentality. It’s some level of aim, of movement. And it may require some extra effort on our behalf. Jesus describes this relationship with outsiders in John 17. He prayed

**John 17:14–18** I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

We’re sent into the world. There’s a sense of being toward outsiders, where we’re there to share the Gospel. Our mindset should be outgoing, understanding our witness. Bubbles are a real danger. One pastor describes the extremes like this. On the one hand, we have to avoid cultural gluttony. This is where we become so much like the world that conversions occur, but the wrong way. On the other hand, we have to face cultural anorexia, where we isolate ourselves from the world to such an extent that conversions never occur. Reverse conversions or no conversions.

In January, 1993, there was Big East basketball. It was the University of Miami vs. the Pittsburgh Panthers. Miami’s coach called a time out to give his team directions on how to keep the lead. Miami is up 84-82. The horn sounds for 15 seconds left in the time out. The team stays huddled. The coach is giving calls15 seconds later, the horn blares again. The time out is over, but the team remains huddled. A Pittsburgh player is handed the ball and doesn’t know what to do. He passes it in and they score a layup. It was uncontested and they tie the game. Miami scrambles and runs on to the court to try to recover, but instantly has the ball stolen and the Panthers score again. They win!

Afterwards, the coach claimed they didn’t hear the buzzer. And the newspaper said with not a little sarcasm, “Considering there were only 4,254 people in a 15,000-seat Miami Arena, how they did not hear the horn remains something of a mystery.” They were stuck in a huddle when they were supposed to be in the game. There is a sense, at least in mindset, where, yes, we gather together for what God has in the huddle, but there’s a sense of scattering for the game, of taking the field, of running the plays, of having an outgoing happening at work mindset to influence people around us.

People are getting invited to this church. We have visitors almost every Sunday for the first time and certainly guests every Sunday. Do we make this place an easy place to be welcome? To bring visitors? If we don’t work on making this place easy to invite people, how are we going to bring our neighbors? It isn’t coffee that will bring people? It’s not programs that will bring people. People bring people. And we need to be ready for God to move us to invite and to bring people, that they might hear this news.

**Quality #3 Full on Efficiency: Witness Opportunely (4:5c)**

We make it count! Now we move from the direction of our witness to our determination.

***5*** *… making the best use of the time.*

It’s being opportune, ready, efficient. The best use of the time. Time is short. Opportunities are limited. Days are numbered. Make the most of them! It’s like a business financier or commercial investor. A faithful steward knows a good opportunity when he sees one. As Christians, our primary capital is time. And what we’re trading for is people. Where will we invest?

I met Gio playing basketball in LA. He was a good player, quick. He was funny. I asked him a few questions and got to know him. He shared his story. He was brought into California from another country. During his time there, some drag racers hit his mom as she was crossing the street. Now she was in a hospital, unresponsive, and half her head was missing. I got invited with him to go and sat with them. I prayed for her and prayed for him. I gave him a ride. We would invite him and his girlfriend and their twins over to get to know them. We tried to share the gospel with them and invited them to church. And then one day, we had to move to Illinois. And that was one of the hardest situations to let go. What will happen with him? We made the most of the opportunity we had and we had to pray that God would continue to bring people to water.

Maximum impact only happens when our witness is full on. There are so many other opportunities that I’ve let pass. We must make it count! What dims our readiness to seize good chances when they come? We need to be full on. And we need to be in tune.

**Quality #4 An In Tune Warmth: Witness Tastefully (4:6a)**

In a sense, we draw them in. He describes now how we witness.

***6*** *Let your speech always be gracious,…*

It’s winsome talk; loving, warm, thought-provoking. At times, even humorous. At times, it’s right to make them laugh to make them listen. It’s a quality you see in Jesus and even in the rest of the Scriptures. They’re intended to make us laugh. It’s the opposite of harsh. This is the quality of our speech. True Christians speak graciously and they understand how their speech takes effect. We must be in tune and warm in how we speak with one another and outsiders. It matters to our impact. And thinking about how we package our message and words matters. We think of even the nursery workers and how we talk to our children with a warmth that’s in tune with what they can understand. “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” We understand the ears that are listening.

What makes our speech cold or chills our tone or puts us out of tune? What makes our tongues screeching white noise or loud gongs or clanging cymbals? What makes us unloving? Our speech matters. What kind of inside jokes or derogatory comments or Christian-ese, or where does our grace find its limits in our relationships and people sense there’s no more left for them? We don’t compromise, but we do show compassion. Our witness needs to be in tune with warmth to draw them in. Next, our witness needs to make

**Quality #5 An Up Front Distinction: Witness Clearly (4:6b)**

Yes, we need to be warm, but we witness clearly. And sometimes we take a stand. Persuasive attraction, yes, but also bold distinction.

***6*** *Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt…*

The idea is that your words have an effect. There is something distinct, unique, other-worldly about it. Yes, you’re in tune and warm, but you don’t blend in and become bland. The witness must never be unclear. This isn’t a bait and switch. We must be clear in our witness. You remember what Jesus said to His followers in Matthew 5.

**Matthew 5:13–16** You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

It’s not “give glory to you,” but glory to God, because there’s a distinction. They understand where it’s coming from. It’s truth that takes effect. Our witness must be up front if it’s to have an impact.

**Quality #6 On Point Finesse: Witness Capably (4:6c)**

We gear up for what is ahead of us. The content or what we witness about, the dimensions of our witness is vast.

***6*** *… so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*

We need to be ready, prepared, equipped, capable, and proficient in responding to the questions. There’s a finesse required. We’re not sneaky, but ready. Not for quick comebacks for the sake of argument, but for ready answers to questions.

**1 Peter 3:15** but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

We need to be ready for the questions that come. You think of Jesus. He didn’t respond to everyone the same way. There was a finesse. He was different with Nicodemus. He was different with the woman at the well. He was different with the rich young ruler, with the Pharisees. He knew how to answer each one on point, and not be entrapped. And yet, He pointed them to God. Maximum impact requires that our witness is on point. So what are some of the things that impede our readiness or hinder our proficiency? Where is our capability, our competency lacking? How do we need to seek training so we’re ready for those kinds of questions?

Those are the sound checks, the vertical and the horizontal; prayer and witness. What would our kids say about us? What would our spouses say about us? Our co-workers? What would our neighbors say about us? If you feel convicted as I do, counting the ways that you failed in lazy, cowardly silence, praise God that these verses are found in the letter that says our record of debt has been paid in full. It’s been set aside and nailed to the cross. He’s forgiven us of them all. And this is a God who makes dead men alive. Praise God that that new life means a new lifestyle. How do we turn up the volume? Who do we need to talk with God about? And who do we need to talk with about God? What names come to mind?

In the 1990’s, my family was not attending church. We had only visited on

Christmas Eve and Easter, occasionally. We had some neighbors. They were friendly, normal neighbors. We had a few barbecues. Mom had done some scrapbooking together with her. And these neighbors happened to attend a Baptist church across town called Bethany. We visited once. My parents hated it! They heard some missionaries talking from Africa. These neighbors kept inviting us though, and praying for us. When the time was right, a death in our family and a few hours with the Bible, God transformed us through a spiritual explosion. And all of a sudden, we were attending this church. We found a Sunday School class had been praying for us for almost a year. And before 2000, my dad quit his job and moved us to California for Seminary. 2 ½ years later, we were missionaries in Africa. Now they’ve been there for years, spreading this message.

How do we maximize our impact as a church? It is as simple as talking with God about people, and talking with people about God. But for that to happen, silence is not an option. We have to speak up!