

# Pray for Open Doors and Right Words

## *Colossians 4:2-4*

This week I had the joy of having coffee with one of the young men in our church family. He is recent in the revival of his soul to Christ after years of living a self-directed life. I won't tell too much of his story because he plans to be baptized soon and he is excited to tell it. But I was curious about **what happened** that led him back to vibrant faith in Jesus. When I asked, he shared that his return to following Jesus began when God started to convict him of his sin. Inexplicably, he began to feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit for the life choices that he was making. **He did not really know why he did not feel convicted for years while he lived away from Jesus' Lordship, nor could he explain what really caused the change.**

**We talked together about conviction of sin being a work of love from the Spirit and how God loves us enough to convict us even when we are walking away from Him.** I know that during those years, this young man had a mom and a dad who prayed over and over for his soul. I also know that he had some friends from our church who prayed and prayed and prayed. I know that God heard those prayers. I know that the change in this young man's life is wholly of the LORD. I share this story because it is such a clear example of the power of God to transform lives and the connection of prayer to that transformation.

**Truth: Salvation always is a miracle of grace . . . and this is why prayer is such a central part of God's plan for evangelism.**

The labor of prayer is as central to our fruitful witness as is the labor of sharing the Gospel. **We should not expect people to come to faith in Jesus if we do not share the Word of Christ with them.** How can they believe if they have never heard? **And we should not expect people to come to faith in Jesus if we do not pray for the salvation of their souls.** How can they believe if God does not open their eyes to see His glory in the face of Jesus.

All through the month of January, our plan at Bethany is to cover biblical passages that uncover the link between **evangelism and prayer . . . between the mission of the church to make disciples and the method of the church to make petition to God.** These two actions of the disciple of Jesus cannot be unhinged from the other. **Our witness for Jesus rests on the Spirit's miraculous work of**

**opening blind eyes . . . of granting faith to hardened hearts . . . of bringing life to dead souls.** We have no power in ourselves to produce the miracle of a spiritual new birth. The power of the Gospel resides in God alone. Prayer connects to God who then in turn uses our feeble efforts to perform the miracle of new birth. This is God's method of bringing light to dark hearts.

**Main Idea: Only God can open doors to give us opportunities to proclaim Jesus to our friends and family. Only God can give us the right words to point them to Jesus. Since this is true, let us pray for God to work!!!**

### **The Priority of Evangelism in a Disciple's Life**

As you begin another new year, I urge you to ask yourself, *"What place does evangelism have in my life? What space do I plan to make for sharing the Gospel with others? What expectations does God lay upon me as a recipient of His grace and love?"*

I pray that God will use Colossians 4 this morning to awaken our soul to hear God's purpose for our lives as He calls us to follow Jesus. Here we see right away the extent that Paul believed God would have him go as a witness to the Gospel. You see Paul is not writing from a nice church office or a cabin retreat by a lake. Paul is writing from prison. "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**—" (Colossians 4:3 [ESV](#))

Colossians is one of four letters that Paul writes likely while he is on house arrest in Rome during his two-year imprisonment from 60-62 AD.

**Why is Paul in prison?** Paul explains, that it is on account of his declaring the mystery of Christ. In Acts 28, Paul explains his imprisonment this way, *"it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain."* (Acts 28:20 [ESV](#)).

The hope of Israel refers to the fulfillment of the OT promises given to Israel regarding a Savior that God will send to her . . . a Messiah to come who will one day return as King over Israel and the whole world. Telling the message of God's Messiah was such a priority to Paul that he won't stop even though it means he loses his freedom and maybe his life.

**Question: Do you have any activity that is so important to you that you would willingly go to prison to continue doing it?** That list is pretty small! But one thing on that list for the follower of Jesus is the proclamation of the Gospel.

While in prison Paul is under constant surveillance by Roman soldiers and yet in this restricted space God opens opportunity for Paul to witness to the glory of Jesus. Luke tells us that *"From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved."* (Acts 28:23-24 [ESV](#))

Where did Paul get the idea that telling the Gospel was such an important priority that nothing is to stop it . . . not the threat of prison and not even prison itself? Answer: At his conversion!

*"And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and standing by me said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard.'" (Acts 22:12-15 [ESV](#))*

Protest: But Paul is special! Yes. But every disciple of Jesus is given this same priority the moment we choose to follow Jesus.

*"While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.'" Immediately they left their nets and followed him." (Matthew 4:18-20 [ESV](#))*

**Truth: Telling others the Gospel is central to our identity as Christ-followers. Witness is who we are! Witnessing is what we do!**

*"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." (2 Corinthians 5:20 [ESV](#))*

**Jesus expands the purpose of His disciples' lives.** These men were engaging in the noble work of fishing when Jesus found them. This is honorable work as it feeds families and gives nourishment to children. When Jesus enters a life, He always expands the purpose of that life to include eternity.

**Truth: Every disciple of Jesus possesses eternal purpose . . . namely to lead others to eternal life in Christ Jesus. We received the responsibility to tell others about Jesus on the day we received Jesus by faith.**

**The meaning of Jesus' words cannot be missed here: People who follow Jesus learn how to lead people out of sin to the Savior . . . they labor to bring others out of spiritual darkness into the light of relationship with God.**

Friend, if you are a follower of Jesus, Jesus says you will fish for men. It is what disciples do!

### **How can I make evangelism a priority in my life?**

- 1. Consider Jesus' call to discipleship.**
- 2. Ask the LORD to give you a passion for God's glory. He gave us life through the blood of His Son. He is worthy to be proclaimed!**
- 3. Ask the LORD to give you an informed love for others.**

**An informed love considers the horrible judgment that others will experience if they do not believe in Jesus. An informed love considers the love of God others will experience when they believe in Jesus. Paul speaks to both of these motivations in 2 Corinthians 5.**

*"Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others." (2 Corinthians 5:11 ESV)*

The Judgment of God against all sin is certain. Hell is a real place that never ends.

*"For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all," (2 Corinthians 5:14 ESV)*

**Practical application:** First, envision your friend today standing before the holy God on Judgement Day without a Savior. Only fearful trembling. Second, envision your friend on Judgment Day having received the love of Christ. Tears of joy!!

**Do you remember the starving lepers who fed at the abandoned camp of the Syrians in Elisha's day? Do you remember what they said as they thought about the people in the city who had no food?**

*"And when these lepers came to the edge of the camp, they went into a tent and ate and drank, and they carried off silver and gold and clothing and went and hid them. Then they came back and entered another tent and carried off things from it and went and hid them. Then they said to one another, **"We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news. If we are silent and***

*wait until the morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore come; let us go and tell the king's household.”” (2 Kings 7:8-9 [ESV](#))*

The Priority of Evangelism in a Disciple's Life. We cannot overstate how important this is to God.

### **The Problem of Evangelism in the Disciple's Life**

If evangelism were not a problem for the disciple of Jesus, we would not need so many exhortations to engage in it. I do not think I have to spend much time proving to you that evangelism is a problem. You FEEL it! Paul felt it! Consider what a problem evangelism is to Paul. He was a man like us. He does not feel great about being despised and then arrested and then thrown into prison. If you were sitting in prison today, would you not wake up thinking, “I have a problem.”?

Question: What makes evangelism a problem for you? Why do you find evangelism so hard?

### **Three key problems to overcome:**

#### **Problem #1: Satan will resist you! Evangelism excites spiritual war!**

*“we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us.” (1 Thessalonians 2:18 [ESV](#))*

#### **Problem #2: Fear will paralyze you! Evangelism excites the hatred of the world.**

*“Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored. . . and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith.” (2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 [ESV](#))*

#### **Problem #3: Spiritual lethargy will dull you! Evangelism requires vibrant faith.**

Often our problem is unbelief . . . a faith too weak to walk into the world with Jesus' mission in our hearts.

### **The Partnership of Evangelism in the Disciple's Life.**

**We are not alone when we take the Gospel to our world. Jesus is working right with us and next to us!**

*"For we are God's fellow workers." (1 Corinthians 3:9 [ESV](#))*

What is God's role in this work? God creates souls with the capacity to know Him. God sends His Son in love to make an atoning sacrifice for sin. God raises up His Son from the grave. God writes a living Book that possesses power to bring salvation to all who believe it. God sends His Spirit who opens blind eyes and brings life to dead souls. God then commissions His servants as His instruments to go out into all the world to preach the Gospel. God then strengthens and supports His servants as they do His work. God then uses the feeble efforts of His servants to accomplish the miracle of new birth! THAT is God's part in this work.

What is our role in this work? To simply be a witness to Jesus and to His love and ability to save our soul from death.

Do you see why Paul as he talks about this matter of evangelism begins this way . .

*"Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving." (Colossians 4:2 [ESV](#))*

**Truth: Prayer is God's means to connect us to His Person and to His power so that we can love Him and do His will.**

**Question: Do you pray? Do you pray for God to use you as His witness?**

Illustration: Conversation with young man this week. "When I was living for myself and not for the LORD, I would use prayer in emergencies or when I wanted something for myself. Good grade on a test. Healing from a sickness. Etc . . . Now that I have new life in Jesus I pray about so many things! I all the time thanking God for His love for me and thinking about all His good gifts of grace to me."

**Truth: Vibrant faith fills our prayer life with every matter that is important to God.** Praise. Confession of sin. Thanksgiving. Spiritual health. AND evangelism.

This week my family and I were talking about the sorrow of many who have grown up in the church under the teaching of the Gospel who then abandon Jesus and God's Word.

Illustration: "Malakai. What would you want us to do if you started believing Satans lies?" Answer. I would want you to pray a lot for me.

Is not that the most precious answer anyone could give? Malakai already knows that a dad has no access to change a son's heart when that son is under the darkness of the evil one. Only God can free a slave.

Church, if I ever begin to believe Satan's lies, I would want you to pray a lot for me. Do you know of anyone who is believing Satan's lies right now? Husband, wife, brother, sister, son, daughter, friend, neighbor.

It is tempting to get frustrated with them, especially if you think that they should know better. But are you praying a lot for them?

### **The Petitions of Evangelism in the Disciple's Life.**

What should we SPECIFICALLY pray for in relationship to our witness in this world? Practicing the PRIORITY of evangelism begins with praying about this matter. No one will become an effective evangelist without making evangelism a key part of our prayer life. This entire series in January to encourage us to begin praying!

Do you want to make changes in your life so that you will be God's witness to your world? Pray! Do you want to see God use you to bring others to eternal life? Pray! Do you want to have joy in the Lord as a servant of Christ? Pray! Do you wish to fulfill God's eternal purpose for your life here on earth? Pray!

#### **1. Pray for propped doors.**

*"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—" (Colossians 4:3 [ESV](#))*

Though Paul is a bold man, a studied disciple and an experienced missionary, he knows that his boldness, his training, or his experience will not open doors for him

to declare the Good News to others. Paul knows that God is the one who opens doors of opportunity. So he asks, "Would you pray for us?"

Paul uses this same metaphor in 1 Corinthians 16 to describe God's work of opening doors for witness.

*"But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries." (1 Corinthians 16:8-9 [ESV](#))*

**Truth: God goes before us in our witness to create specific opportunities for us to share the grace of God in Jesus.**

**Application: Let us pray that God creates opportunities and that we see the opportunities that God opens for us every day. Pray for yourself. Pray for one another.**

Illustration: Praying over this and God opened a door for me in an unexpected place. Filling up tires at Costco. Thanked him for the service. He said that one guy recently chewed him out because he told him that he would be over as soon as he finished helping another customer.

"Yes. So much stress and conflict in our world."

"New Year's. Man of Peace. Psalm 37."

"Yes. That is great! I want that too."

"Do you have a faith in God?"

"Yes. I grew up Catholic. But now I converted to Christian."

Interesting choice of words. Do you have a home church?

No. My girlfriend is not on the same page as I am about God.

Really? Tell me about it.

"She was abused as a child. Then went to live with a relative who abused her mentally." "She needs to know how much God loves her."

Yes. We are not getting along and I am thinking of moving out.

Well, maybe New Year . . . new opportunity to walk with God and become part of a church family.

Where do you live? (Good churches all over our area.). Pekin.

Ok. Living hope. Friend of mine is the pastor there. Wow. I think I will check it out.

If you willing to drive a bit farther. I am the pastor of Bethany. A larger church. If you come, stop by and remind me that you helped me at Costco. Smile. I will!

God loves to open doors for us! Are you ready for God to do that for you this week?

**Truth: God's guidance is sometimes negative.**

*"And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. **And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.** So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." (Acts 16:6-10 [ESV](#))*

## **2. Prayer for proper words.**

*"that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak." (Colossians 4:4 [ESV](#))*

*"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, . . . ." (Ephesians 6:19-20 [ESV](#))*

**This is Paul! He never seems to be at a loss for words.**

**Truth: Specific words matter. No one has the natural ability to place the eternal message of the Gospel into words that reach the heart.**

We need God to speak through us. Left to ourselves we will often communicate the wrong tone . . . the wrong angle . . . the wrong application.

## **Four lessons about proper words**

### **Lesson #1: Proper words can flow only from a Spirit-led tongue.**

*"And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, **for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.**" (Mark 13:10-11 [ESV](#))*

We pray for proper words because we believe the Holy Spirit is real and that He loves to guide us as we witness for Jesus.

ASIDE: This does NOT exclude the studies and careful preparation for any prayer, message or sermon. The Holy Spirit is as present when a person is writing down

remarks as when He is working extemporaneously. Study and preparation are wise and commended by God. I have often been saddened when I hear God's people render a judgment of condemnation upon other brothers and sisters who prepared remarks or prayers to lead us in public prayer or in public exhortation. The judgment is made, *"Since he reads his prayer, he is not being led by the Spirit."* Friends, remember that Satan is the accuser of the brothers and he loves to discourage those who labor in His kingdom. Be an encourager! It is not wrong to enjoy the prayers or preaching of one servant more than you do another. But it is wrong to judge with harshness and condemnation. The church's witness is weakened by these heart attitudes.

It does mean that we need the Holy Spirit to speak on behalf of God to men.

"And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness." (Acts 4:31 [ESV](#))

Truth: We speak to God about men so that we can effectively speak to men about God.

## **Lesson #2: Proper words can flow only from a consistent life.**

*"Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time."* (Colossians 4:5 [ESV](#))

No one can expect to be an effective witness for Jesus if we are walking in disobedience to Jesus. Now God CAN use anyone. But praying for a life consistent with the message is vital to our desire to be God's witness.

*"Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, **but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.**"* (Titus 2:9-10 [ESV](#))

**If our lives are ugly, they will stand in the way of other's seeing the beauty of God's Gospel.**

## **Lesson #3: Proper words can flow only from a loving heart.**

*"Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person."* (Colossians 4:6 [ESV](#))

## **Lesson #4: Proper words can flow only from a Word-guided mind.**

*“The following night the Lord stood by him and said, **“Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.”**” (Acts 23:11 [ESV](#)).*

*“When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, **testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.** And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved.” (Acts 28:23-24 [ESV](#))*

**--Proper words can flow only from a consistent life.**

**--Proper words can flow only from a loving heart.**

**--Proper words can flow only from a Spirit-led tongue.**

**--Proper words can flow only from a Word-guided mind.**

Application: Pray this week for open doors and for proper words to say when God opens those doors. Will you do this? Seven days and let us see what God does in answer to our prayers!

*Conclusion:*

*Love through me, Love of God;  
There is no love in me.  
O Fire of love, light Thou the love  
That burns perpetually.*

*Flow through me, Peace of God;  
Calm River, flow until  
No wind can blow, no current stir  
A ripple of self-will.*

*Shine through me, Joy of God;  
Make me like Thy clear air  
That Thou dost pour Thy colors through,  
As though it were not there*

*O blessed Love of God,  
That all may taste and see  
How good Thou art, once more I pray:  
Love through me—even me.  
~ Amy Carmichael*