

The Biblical Theology of Evangelism

Colossians 4:2-6 - NCBC, January 5, 2020

Main Point: **Evangelism talks to God about people, and to people about God.**

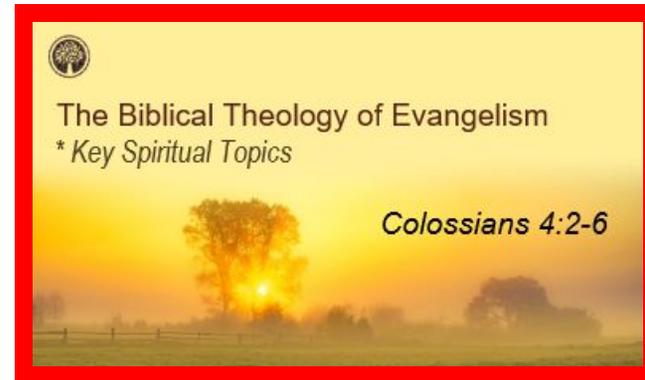
- The Biblical Progression of Evangelism
 - The Temple's Attraction Model: Come and See!
 - The Church's Expansion Model: Go and Tell!
- Talk to God about People through Prayer (2-4)
 - Prayer's Passions
 - Prayer's Petitions
- Talk to People about God through Witness (5-6)
 - The Witness of Wise Walking
 - The Witness of Tasty Talking

Application: **Go and prayerfully fulfill the mission of the church.**

Opening Announcements:

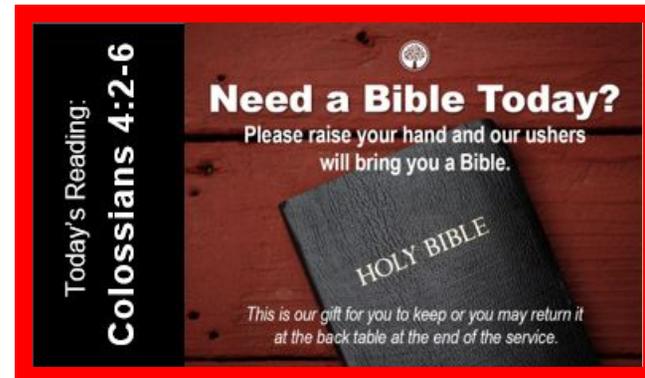
- **Women's Bible Study** starts 1/28 and 1/29 - registration now open!! All ladies encouraged to benefit from this exceptional study!!
- **Biblical Counseling Conference Reg. Deadline** is this coming Friday.

<<For the Cause>>

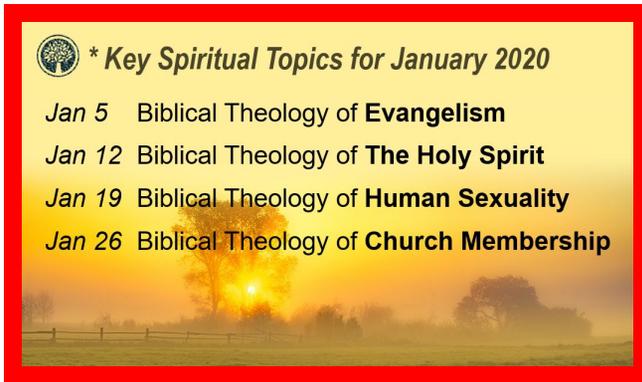


As long as God gives us breath, may we proclaim the exalted name of Christ... the Name through which people from every tribe and nation will be redeemed and rescued from the curse of sin!

Please continue your worship now by opening your copy of God's Word to **Colossians chapter 4** this morning.

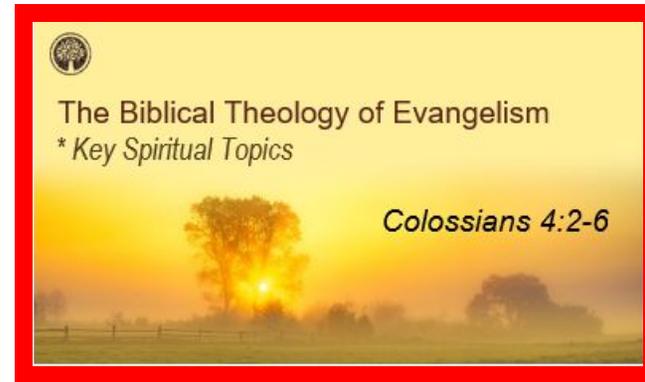


If you don't have a Bible with you, simply raise your hand as we'd love to give you a Bible as our gift to you today! Today's Scripture reading will be taken from **Colossians chapter 4, verses 2-6.**



This January we are stepping away from our **Matthew** sermon series in order to consider some Key Spiritual Issues from more of a topical approach.

Today I desire to renew our passion for **evangelism**. Next Sunday we will recall the supernatural nature of God's people with a message on the **Holy Spirit**. Then I pray God will allow me to offer some hope-saturated biblical clarity to the matter of **human sexuality**, before closing the month with a message on the priority and significance of **church membership**. Lord willing, we plan to return to our study of **Matthew's Gospel** then in February.



Today I've selected **Colossians 4:2-6** to anchor our meditation on The Biblical Theology of Evangelism.

Please stand in honor of the reading of God's Word. From the English Standard Translation, I'm reading from **Colossians 4**, starting in **verse 2**:

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.

This is God's Word. Please be seated.

Let's Pray.

Ezekiel chapter 37 is one of my favorite chapters in the Bible. **Ezekiel 37** describes a valley filled with dry bones

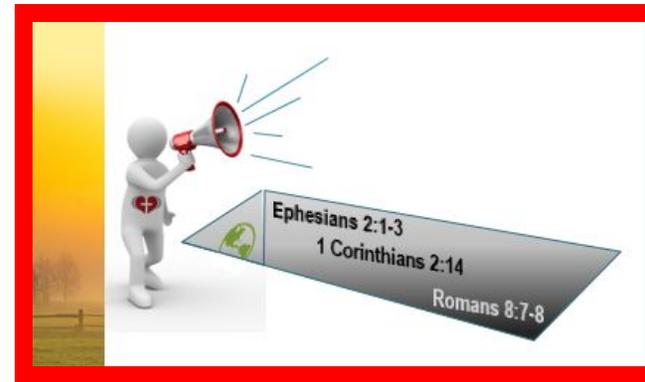
– where God commands the prophet to bring an entire valley of dead skeletons to life by preaching His Word! God promises Ezekiel that He will open graves and give new life to the dead as the prophet proclaims God’s message!

Now try to put yourself in Ezekiel’s sandals! If God commanded you to go and preach to our local cemetery, what would you do? What strategy would you employ, and what evangelistic methods would you rely on? Who would you take with you on your evangelistic mission to the cemetery?¹

Would you take a really good communicator? Or a people person – a bold extrovert? Or a whole box of Gospel tracts? Who or what would be most helpful to your resurrection ministry in the cemetery? A Bible scholar? A trained apologist who can answer any objections from atheists?

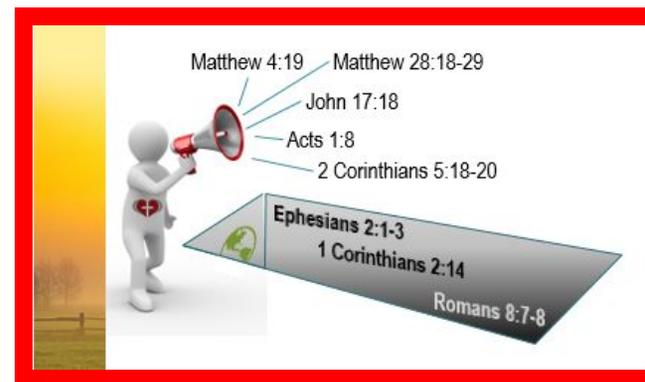
No. I believe as you left for the cemetery, you’d want someone with you who truly knew God personally ... a person of faith, a person of prayer... for you fully understand that the only way your mission will be successful is if God Himself opens the graves and gives life to those you witness to!!

Now church... please listen. This is the biblical mindset for evangelism.



Ephesians 2 describes every unbeliever as dead in sin.² According to **1 Corinthians 2**, it’s not even possible for unbelievers to understand spiritual truth.³ Their mind is dead. **Romans 8** teaches that the unbelieving mind *cannot* submit to God.⁴

And yet, God has clearly commissioned every Christ-follower to evangelize.



² Ephesians 2:1-3, 5; c.f. Colossians 2:13 and Luke 15:24

³ 1 Corinthians 2:14

⁴ Romans 8:7-8; c.f. 3:10-18; Ephesians 4:17-19; Colossians 1:21; 2 Timothy 2:26

¹ I’m grateful to Francis Chan for the idea behind this illustration.
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Consider Jesus' words to His disciples:⁵

Matthew 4:19 *Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*

Matthew 28:18-19 *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*

In **Acts 1:8**, Jesus commissions them saying, *You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*

Then in **2 Corinthians 5:18-20** Paul teaches that,

Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation; ...entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us.

Clearly, from a biblical worldview, every Christian is commanded to evangelize a planet filled with spiritually dead people. Evangelism is not optional.

Now evangelism is a big word that is often misunderstood. Evangelism is not inviting others to church. It is not a large event that often includes a tent. It is not just a program of the church, and it is not about manipulation, or winning an argument.

⁵ C.f. Matthew 5:16; 9:37-38; John 17:18; 2 Timothy 4:5; 1 Peter 3:15, etc.

According to the New Testament, evangelism is just proclaiming the gospel or the good news – the “evangel.” **Evangelism is proclaiming the person and work of Jesus Christ on behalf of lost sinners for the purpose of their saving response in faith.**

As we will soon see from **Colossians chapter 4**,



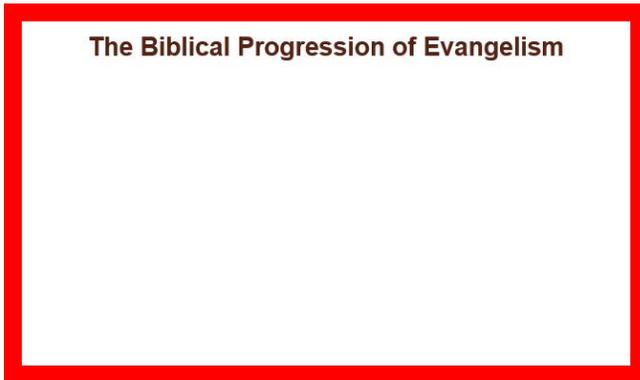
Evangelism first talks to God about people, and then to people about God.

Faithful evangelism begins with prayer, talking to God about people, because the evangelist understands only God's Spirit gives life – the flesh is no help at all!⁶ But faithful evangelism also intentionally talks to people about God ... because Christ-followers no longer live for ourselves, but for the glory of the One who has forgiven our sins and secured our eternal life with Christ!⁷

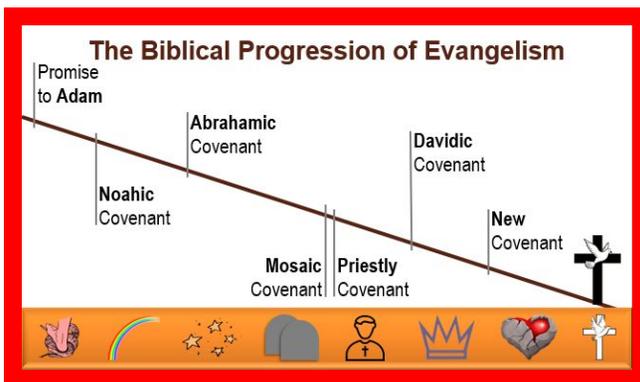
⁶ John 6:63

⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

Now before we dig into our study of **Colossians 4**, I want us to clearly understand,



The biblical progression of evangelism throughout the Scriptures. For in fact, some of our church's confusion about evangelism today may be due to a failure to see how God has intended to reveal His glory to spiritually dead people over time.



This timeline marks the major covenants, or promises, that God has made with His people throughout history.

First in **Genesis 3**,⁸ we discover God Himself is the first evangelist. For God pursued Adam and Eve in their sin, and proclaimed salvation through a coming Messiah!

When the world rejected the preaching of Noah,⁹ God makes sure to preserve one family for Himself through the ark.¹⁰ In **Genesis 11**, God scatters Noah's descendants who only wanted to build a name for themselves – separating clans with different languages thereby creating different nations all around the world.

Then in **Genesis 12** God selects one of these clans – the family of Abraham, to be His chosen nation through which all of the other nations would be blessed.¹¹

As Abraham's family continues through time, God raises up a prophet named Moses to deliver His people from slavery.¹² God then gives His people the Mosaic Covenant – or the Law, or His teaching – so they will know how to live as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”¹³ You see God's design for His chosen people always had an evangelistic purpose! So that all the nations would be drawn to glorify God by the witness of God's people!¹⁴

Now don't miss this – the Mosaic Covenant also revealed how God Himself could manifest His glory – in the most

⁸ Genesis 3:15

⁹ 2 Peter 2:5

¹⁰ Genesis 8-9

¹¹ Genesis 12, 15, 17

¹² Exodus 2-3

¹³ Exodus 19:5-6

¹⁴ Deuteronomy 4:5-6

central and holiest place of His people, as a cloud by day and fire by night – resting over the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle.



So from the time of Moses through the Prophets God's glory is most clearly displayed to the world by His presence among His people – at first in a tabernacle, and then in successive temples.

The temple provided a evangelistic witness to all the nations of the world that there was a God who drew near to His people.¹⁵ **1 Kings 8** explicitly states that God placed His glory in the temple so that all the peoples of the earth may know His name.¹⁶

This helps us understand why David and Solomon and Ezra were so consumed with building and rebuilding the temple of God among God's people. The temple was not just the center of worship for God's people... it was the center of evangelism as well! It was where all the nations of the world could "come and see" that there was a living

¹⁵ Deuteronomy 4:5-6

¹⁶ 1 Kings 8:41-43

God of glory who desired to dwell together with His people in peace.

Then in the Gospels, Jesus changes everything!



In Jesus Christ, the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, and all people saw His glory – glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.¹⁷

So when Jesus ascends back to the Father after securing our salvation through His substitutionary death and resurrection, God sends His Holy Spirit to indwell every individual who believes in Jesus Christ.

¹⁷ John 1:14



The fulfillment of the New Covenant - the indwelling of the Holy Spirit – changed God’s evangelistic strategy. In the Old Testament, God revealed His glory through an *attraction* model of missions – His presence was known through the Temple.

But today, God receives glory using an *expansion* model of missions – His presence is now known through His People. We are His temple.¹⁸ God’s people are no longer localized into one area – but sent to “Go and make disciples of all nations.”¹⁹

So in order to truly glorify God, we must be engaged in the *expansive* mission that God has given to us.



Often we get this wrong – and we adopt an Old Testament approach to witnessing. All our ministry gets centralized at the church house. Our outreach is nothing more than events – held at the church house. But God’s presence is no longer localized at a temple!



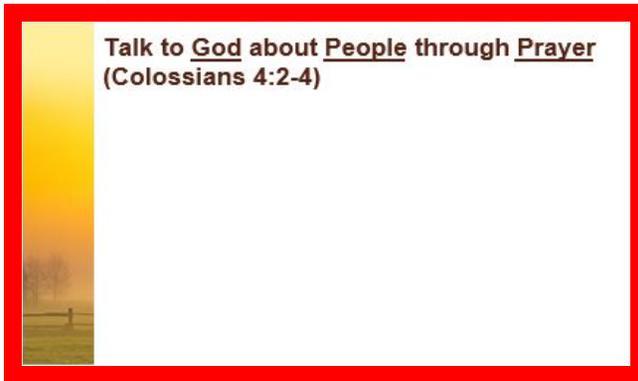
So fill in your blanks now, as you commit to no longer relying on **The Temple’s Attraction model of Come and See!** But instead, by the power of the Holy Spirit who is with us, may every Christ-follower here embrace **The Church’s Expansion model of evangelism.** It’s time for us to **Go and Tell!** There’s no greater means of bringing God glory than by helping others to know God personally just

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 2 Corinthians 6:16-18

¹⁹ Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:45-48; John 20:21

as He already knows you. God is in you now – not just for your personal worship of Him – but for your evangelistic witness!!

Now let's get practical. In **Colossians chapter 4, verses 2-4** we will learn that Spirit-powered evangelism always starts by,



Talking to God about People through Prayer (2-4)

Verse 2 begins to address the question of how Christ-followers should interact with the lost. How to live evangelistically towards unbelievers.

Look at **verse 2**,

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

An evangelistic lifestyle starts with prayer that is energized by the right,



Passions or beliefs.

The direct statement in this verse is “continue steadfastly in prayer” or “devote yourselves to prayer.” Our prayers for the lost must be an overflow of,



Devoted dependence. The present tense indicates this is a lifestyle of persevering prayer ... putting the accent on a faithful intensity. Don't faint... don't quit praying for the salvation of others! Be faithful. Pray without ceasing.²⁰ Don't lose heart.²¹

²⁰ 1 Thessalonians 5:17

²¹ Luke 18:1

God's sovereignty in man's salvation compels me towards prayer – believing that God alone is able to save, and that God chooses to use prayer *along with preaching* as the means by which men's hearts are born again.²²

Remember, evangelism is not about how much human persuasiveness or Bible knowledge you possess. Evangelism is about proclaiming the Gospel to dead hearts in complete dependence upon the Spirit and God's Word which gives new birth!

Do you believe that God sovereignly works through your prayers to bring salvation to your loved ones?

Prayerlessness disconnects us from God's work.²³ So pray with devoted dependence and also with,



Talk to God about People through Prayer
(Colossians 4:2-4)

- Prayer's **Passions**
 - **Devoted** dependence
 - **Thankful** awareness

thankful awareness. **Verse 2** urges us to,

Be watchful in prayer with thanksgiving.

²² Romans 10:14-17

²³ James 4:2-3

Be watchful means “keep alert.” Be vigilant. Be alive to the needs of the world around you and the state of your own heart as well.

You see, only a thankful heart is properly motivated to evangelize. You can't motivate witnessing through guilt. Rather only the heart which knows I am loved and forgiven and accepted by God will experience the worship of thanksgiving. Only the heart that is first under the control of God's love²⁴ will be able to effectively love others in evangelism as well.²⁵

Therefore don't miss this ... biblical evangelism starts with prayer – in order to express dependence upon God, and to first preach the Gospel to myself before I ever preach it to anyone else. Evangelism first talks to God about people in order to align my heart with God's glory, not my own. To purify my heart from pride or self-reliance, and to thank the God of salvation who has saved such a wretch as me.

These are prayer's passions which fuel biblical evangelism. But what should evangelists pray *for*?

²⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:14

²⁵ 1 John 4:19

Talk to God about People through Prayer
(Colossians 4:2-4)

- Prayer's **Passions**
 - **Devoted** dependence
 - **Thankful** awareness
- Prayer's **Petitions**

In **verses 3-4**, we find evangelism's prayerful **petitions**:

Paul urges the Colossians in **verse 3**,

At the same time ... in other words – whenever you pray – pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word...

Talk to God about People through Prayer
(Colossians 4:2-4)

- Prayer's **Passions**
 - **Devoted** dependence
 - **Thankful** awareness
- Prayer's **Petitions**
 - For **opportunities** to proclaim Christ

Evangelism prays **for opportunities to proclaim Christ**.

Remember Paul is writing from a prison cell. Yet he is so focused on fulfilling God's mission that he doesn't ask for his prison doors to be opened, but rather for the doors of

ministry to be opened. He'd rather be a faithful evangelist than a free man!

Church - we pray for what we want most...so do you pray for opportunities to share Christ with others? The purpose of prayer is not to get our will done in heaven...but God's will done on earth.²⁶

So what do you pray for, when you pray? Do you pray for opportunities to share the good news of God's forgiveness of sin with an unbeliever?

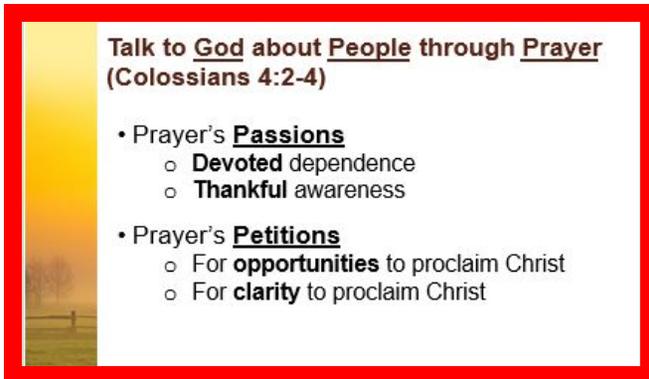
God has called us to be fishers of men, right?



But are we more like aquarium keepers than real fishermen? Church we are not in the pet trade!! We are not just keepers of the aquarium... and our fishing should not be on the local aquariums of other churches around us!

²⁶ Matthew 6:9-10; Luke 11:2

We are to intentionally communicate God's glory to all the nations of the world. God is in us – so that we might witness of His glory to all the fish in the wild!!
So pray specifically for opportunities to proclaim Christ to your non-Christian friends.



Talk to God about People through Prayer
(Colossians 4:2-4)

- Prayer's **Passions**
 - **Devoted** dependence
 - **Thankful** awareness
- Prayer's **Petitions**
 - For **opportunities** to proclaim Christ
 - For **clarity** to proclaim Christ

Pray just like Paul prayed, **for clarity to proclaim Christ.**

...to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison – that I might make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

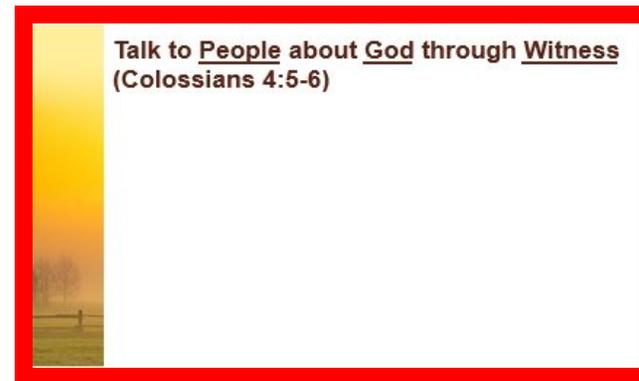
The whole reason Paul's in prison is for preaching Christ. But still he prays for clarity to proclaim Christ just as God would have him to speak.

This is the prayer of all Christ-followers. Praying for bold clarity. So that as God grants opportunities – you would speak of Jesus accurately, truthfully, and clearly.

God loves to answer these prayers!! So this week, will you pray fervently that God will give you at least one opportunity to clearly share Christ with someone? And then come back and share with your Life Group or

Elective class next week on how God answered that prayer. Will you do that? Let's encourage each another, to live thankfully as God's ambassadors here in our region.

Now whenever you pray like this, your heart will burn with the desire to be part of God's answer to your prayer...so out of our prayer closets comes a,



Talk to People about God through Witness
(Colossians 4:5-6)

powerful witness as we talk to people about God.

Verses 5-6 now give us practical instruction how to walk and talk with unbelievers – those who are outside of God's family. So a biblical theology of evangelism proceeds from prayer in **verses 2-4** to,

Talk to People about God through Witness
(Colossians 4:5-6)

- The Witness of **Wise** Walking

The Witness of Wise Walking in **verse 5**.

Walk in wisdom towards outsiders, making the best use of the time.

To walk in wisdom means to conduct ourselves in such a way as to demonstrate to unbelievers that Christ is more than enough – to live so as to make Christ attractive and appealing to those who don't yet know Him personally.

Basically it's this simple – the reputation of God and His Gospel in our community depends upon how we all live in our surrounding communities.

The life that matches its lips is a powerful witness for the sufficiency of Christ!

Talk to People about God through Witness
(Colossians 4:5-6)

- The Witness of **Wise** Walking
 - o Towards outsiders

So notice ... we are called to “walk in wisdom **towards outsiders.**” Towards outsiders... not *avoiding* outsiders. Don't live so that you never interact with unbelievers. Literally the words mean to walk continually toward or “face-to-face” with the unsaved.

Is it possible that some of us have become so insulated from non-Christians that we are failing in our God-given mission?

Verse 5 is clear – since we are called to wise walking... we will make the best use of our time on earth.

Talk to People about God through Witness
(Colossians 4:5-6)

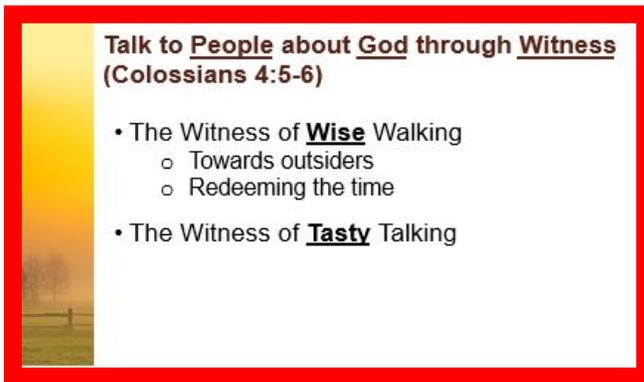
- The Witness of **Wise** Walking
 - o Towards outsiders
 - o Redeeming the time

Redeem the time literally means to “buy-back” the time. Make your life count – use every opportunity to the full for the glory of Christ!

Is there any unbeliever in your life that would listen if you wrote them a card, or invited them to coffee, or purposefully stopped by to pray with them this week?

If the foundation of your life is prayer, and you add the subfloor of a holy and loving life... grace-saturated words will effectively complete your evangelism.

For in **verse 6** we see observe,



Talk to People about God through Witness
(Colossians 4:5-6)

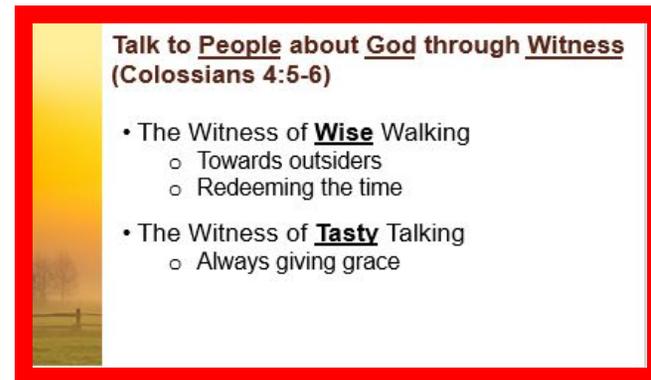
- The Witness of **Wise** Walking
 - Towards outsiders
 - Redeeming the time
- The Witness of **Tasty** Talking

The Witness of **Tasty** Talking.

Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Remember in the context – speech here emphasizes what we say to unbelievers about God.

You must use words to preach the Gospel! Prayer and wise living cannot alone fulfill our evangelistic purpose!



Talk to People about God through Witness
(Colossians 4:5-6)

- The Witness of **Wise** Walking
 - Towards outsiders
 - Redeeming the time
- The Witness of **Tasty** Talking
 - Always giving grace

But when we speak, **our words must be always giving grace** – consistently wholesome, truthful, loving, and helpful words. Yes, that especially applies to social media! There is no witnessing in arguing. Rather the words of God’s children should express God’s grace and His glory – for out of the heart the mouth speaks.²⁷

That word “*always*” is convicting isn’t it? Always giving grace... Even when we’ve been taken advantage of. Even when we’re sitting in a Roman prison for the preaching of Christ ... may our words always treat others better than they deserve for the glory of God.

Just to drive this point home, consider the rest of **verse 6**:

Seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

²⁷ Luke 6:45

Talk to People about God through Witness
(Colossians 4:5-6)

- The Witness of **Wise** Walking
 - Towards outsiders
 - Redeeming the time
- The Witness of **Tasty** Talking
 - Always giving grace
 - Appetizing and beneficial

The point is simple – biblical evangelism uses words that are **appetizing and beneficial**.

In biblical times, salt prevented corruption as a preservative, and it made the foods taste better.

So talk to others about Christ and His glory in a way that is both purifying and cleansing and witty and compelling. Don't bore people with the truths of God becoming a man – being born of a virgin – dying a substitutionary death as the Passover Lamb of God – only to be raised from the dead 3 days later to give everlasting life to whosoever will believe on Him! Don't bore people with the ministry of God's Spirit who indwells our hearts and sets us free from the slavery of sin! No. Open your mouth and redeem every opportunity to tell others about God's grace in a manner that is real, authentic, tactful, and appealing.

Main Point

**Evangelism talks to God about people,
and to people about God.**

Evangelism first talks to God about people, and then to people about God. That's the biblical theology of evangelism!

So how will you respond to God's Word today? My prayer is that you would,

Application

**Go and prayerfully
fulfill the mission
of the church.**

Go and prayerfully fulfill the mission of the church.

Every believer is called to faithfulness in this mission. God's indwelling presence allows for no spectators in His church.

Evangelism starts with submitting your own life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Repenting from your pride and self-reliance. Repenting from a life ruled by fear, self-centeredness, and comfort. Putting your faith in Christ alone for the salvation of your own sins. Preaching the good news of your secure identity as a loved child of God to your own heart first.

And then as you pray - have the right expectations – the world hated Christ so people will also hate you.²⁸ But just make sure outsiders hate you for God’s message of grace... not any of your own unattractive or argumentative methods.

Church, this is a year to speak up. Start the conversation. Use the Bible. Be clear. Ask good questions. And trust God will answer our prayers.



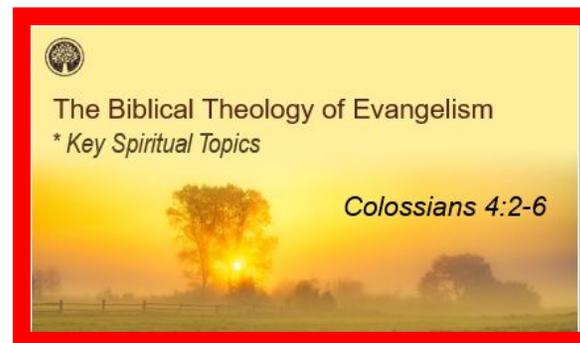
Now to help us intentionally pursue our strategy for evangelizing our neighbors this year, you will notice that we’ve hung maps of our surrounding communities around the room, in alphabetical order.

I know I’m not the only visual person here today – so here’s how this will work. Immediately after the benediction, I’m asking for each household to send one representative to the map where you presently live. Take one of the colored pins – one per household – and pin the flag on the map where you presently live.

Together this will create a visual picture of how God has strategically placed our New Castle family as His Gospel ambassadors all around our communities –for the sake of His glory!!

For the next several months I pray these maps will remind us of our mission together – provoking creative collaboration about how we could do a neighborhood grill night, or a Bible Overview, or an ESL life group together right in our own neighborhoods. Perhaps this exercise will give you more visual ownership of the neighborhood that God has entrusted to you.

Church – God is with us...all so that the world would know His glory!! May we talk to God and to others with greater intentionality this week. This is a mind-shift for some of us. It won’t happen without much prayer. May God help us live for His glory together.



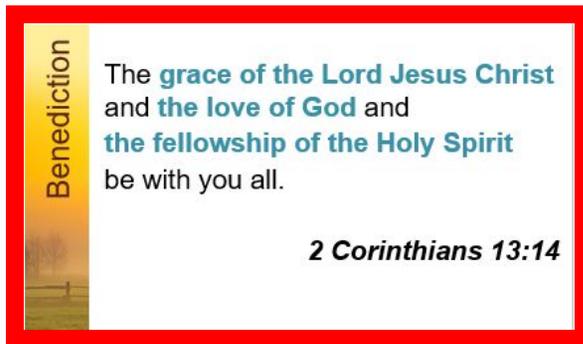
²⁸ Matthew 5:10-12; John 15:18-16:4; 2 Timothy 3:12
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Let's pray.

<<For the Cause>>

TODAY'S Special 2020 Vision Assembly at 9:30a. Please pick up a copy of the *Art of Neighboring Book* if you missed this special time together.

Let's pray our benediction together as we dismiss.



The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. 2 Corinthians 13:14

Recommended Resources on Evangelism:

- Ezekiel 37:1-14
- Matthew 9:35-38; 10:5-42; 28:18-20
- Mark 16:15
- Luke 24:45-48
- Acts 1:8; 4:23-37
- Romans 10:14-17
- 2 Corinthians 4:1-15; 5:11-6:13
- 1 Timothy 1:12-17
- 2 Timothy 2:24-26; 4:1-5
- 1 Peter 3:13-17

- <https://www.desiringgod.org/topics/evangelism/messages>

- <https://www.challies.com/resources/7-scripture-texts-about-evangelism/>
- <https://www.9marks.org/article/journalsix-benefits-evangelism-discipleship/>

- The Art of Neighboring, by Jay Pathak & Dave Runyon
- Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God by J.I. Packer
- The Gospel and Personal Evangelism, by Mark Dever
- Something Needs to Change, David Platt
- Tell the Truth, by Will Metzger

Life Group Questions for Growing Deeper:

1. Read Romans 10:8-17, especially verse 16. Is evangelism calling people to make a decision or to become disciples of Christ? What is the difference? How does this influence your approach to evangelism?
2. Read John 3:3, 5-6 and 6:63, 65. How do these Scripture influence your approach to evangelism?
3. Read 2 Corinthians 5:10-21. Note the two biblical motivations for evangelism in this text (vv. 11 & 14). Discuss what most hinders your faithful witness? What are some wrong motivations for evangelism? What would you change in your life if you were formally employed as God's ambassador on earth?
4. Review Colossians 4:2-6. What do you pray for when you pray? Explain how your gospel identity inspires thanksgiving which fuels evangelism.
5. Review the table of contents for *The Art of Neighboring* book you were given. Which chapter most interests you? Are you willing to read this book this year? Who will you read this book with?