

How To Be A Winsome Witness

Colossians 4:2-6

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Let's read Colossians 4:2-6.

Paul says, "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains..."—Paul is writing these words from a prison cell in Rome —"...that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one."

"You are writing a Gospel,

A chapter each day,

By deeds that you do,

By words that you say.

Men read what you write,

Whether faithless or true;

Say, what is the Gospel

According to you?"

People are watching the way that you live, so the question is, "Are you living the Gospel?"

Let's look at the key text, verse 5, where Paul says, "Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside..."—the non-Christian, the unbelieving world—"...redeeming the time." In this section, Paul is talking about the worthy walk, walking in wisdom toward non-Christians, how we are to live our lives. It is true that we are writing a Gospel by the things that we do and say. How are you living out your Christian life before a watching world? We are to be living out Christ before the world. We, as Christ's followers, have a responsibility to be an effective witness to the watching world.

But the questions are, "How do I do that? What do I need to do in order to become an effective witness?" I want to give you three things that you need to do to become an effective witness before a watching world. Number one, you need to pray purposefully. Verses 2-4 tell us how to pray. Starting in verse 2, Paul says, "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains that I may make it manifest..."—or

“clear”—“...as I ought to speak.” So we can’t be an effective witness if we don’t learn to pray. Prayer is the life of the believer; staying in fellowship with God through prayer.

Someone said, “Before we speak to men for God, we need to speak to God for men.” I like that. Before you go out to tell other people about God, you need to be on your knees telling God about those people and praying for them.

Specifically, there are four ways that we should pray. First, we need to pray faithfully or continually pray. If I am going to be an effective, winsome witness, I must learn to pray faithfully. That is seen in verse 2 in the phrase, “Continue earnestly in prayer.” That word “continue” appears about 13 times in the New Testament.

In the Greek, where it says, “Continue in prayer,” it is called an “imperative.” That means that it is a command; it’s not a suggestion. Since God commands us to pray, then not to pray is a sin; not to pray is disobedience. If God tells us to pray and we don’t pray, then it is called the “sin of omission.” It’s not that we have done something; it’s that we haven’t done something—we haven’t prayed. You can sin by doing nothing. When God tells us to do something and we don’t do it, that’s when we have committed the sin of omission. So we need to be faithfully praying, continually praying. We need to give our time and attention to prayer. The NASB translation renders this verse to “Devote yourselves to prayer.” It’s to be continual and steadfast. The Weymouth translation renders it, “Be earnest and unwearied in prayer.”

In the Greek, the word “continue” has the idea of being strong. It has the idea of “be devoted to, give time and attention to, give your strength to” the task of prayer. So it means we are to give our strength, our energy and our attention to prayer. We don’t usually do that; prayer is kind of a secondary thing, something that we push to the side. Very rarely do we make it a priority. Do we really emphasize that “I need to pray and spend time in prayer”? So the focus here is that we give our time and attention to prayer.

Luke 18 is one of my favorite sections on the subject of prayer. It is where Jesus teaches on prayer by using parables. Before Jesus gives us the parable of the unjust judge, He says in Luke 18:1, “Men always ought to pray and not lose heart.” I love that. I think we turn that around and we faint because we don’t pray. If we prayed, we wouldn’t faint, but we faint because we don’t pray. James 4:2 says that “You do not have because you do not ask.” So we need to spend more time talking to God in prayer, asking of the Lord. Remember to give your time and attend, to be persevering in prayer.

Secondly, we need to pray watchfully. Verse 2 in the KJV says, “and watch in the same.” The word “watch” is a figure of speech which means “to stay awake” spiritually, alert, devotedly. Awake watchfully can be used literally: you don’t sleep but stay awake. But it also is used figuratively: to be spiritually or mentally alert, to give your attention and focus to something.

It’s not saying that you can’t sleep—praise God for sleep! I love to sleep. My wife tells me that I have the gift of sleep. The Bible says, “He gives his beloved sleep.” I claim that promise. But

we don't want to go to sleep regarding prayer. We want to stay awake and be alert and watchful.

The word "continue" in prayer is used in Acts 1:14 where it says, "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication." It is used in Acts 6:4 where the leaders of the church said, "We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." It is used in Romans 12:12 where Paul says, "continuing steadfastly in prayer." We are to be alert and watch in prayer.

Remember when Jesus went into the Garden of Gethsemane? He was going to be praying in light of Calvary. He took Peter, James and John a little deeper into the garden, and He asked them to "watch and pray." It's the same idea. Here He literally meant, "Don't go to sleep; stay awake and pray." Then He went a little deeper into the garden and lay prostrate on the ground. He prayed three times, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me." But when He got up from His prayer, He went back to His disciples. But they were sleeping. He woke them up and said, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray...The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

How many times does it happen that when you actually get down to pray, you fall asleep? So we need to be alert and pay attention to the importance of prayer. "Watch in the same." I think this watching in prayer means, "Don't forget the importance of prayer." It means don't fall asleep mentally but stay alert and remember the importance of prayer.

In 1 Peter 5:8, Peter says, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." Peter was one of those disciples who fell asleep in Gethsemane, and it eventually led to his denial of the Lord. So we need to stay awake and stay alert.

We pray faithfully, we pray watchfully and thirdly, we need to pray thankfully. I love this. Notice it in verse 2: "with thanksgiving." So he says, "withal, praying for us, watching in the same, with thanksgiving." To maintain your zest and zeal for prayer, you have to have a thankful heart. In 1 Thessalonians 5:18, it says, "In everything give thanks." Now note that he doesn't say, "For everything give thanks." You might be going through a trial or a temptation or a time of testing or hardship or adversity. You aren't thankful for that. Maybe there is a sickness or a bereavement. But be thankful in the midst of that.

I prayed with a dear woman from our church after the first service, who recently lost her husband of over 50 years. She knows he's with the Lord and that she'll see him again, but her heart is broken. She's now separated from someone she loves so much. But the Bible says that we should not "sorrow as others who have no hope." We do sorrow, but it's not a hopeless sorrow. So "In everything give thanks" to the Lord.

I believe that when Paul says in verse 2 "with thanksgiving," the idea there is that the cultivation of a thankful heart will do much to keep one alert and alive in their prayer life. In other words, if

you stop being thankful, then quite often you stop praying. If all you're doing is asking for something without thanking the Lord, you're not really being drawn to Him. So a thankful heart is one of the ingredients in order to continue in prayer. To be faithful and watchful in prayer, we must have a thankful heart in prayer. So Paul is encouraging us to pray and to do it with thanksgiving.

An old Scottish prayer book says, "We praise Thee for the grace by which Thou hast enabled us to so bear the ills of the present world; that our souls are to be enriched by a fuller experience of Your love; that we would have a more childlike dependence on Thy will and a deeper sympathy with the suffering for the sad and hurting." How beautiful is that. Even in your sorrow, your suffering and your pain, you can be thankful that God uses it to keep you dependent on Him, experiencing Him and He gives you sympathy and compassion for others who suffer.

So we pray faithfully, watchfully and thankfully. Then fourth, we need to pray purposefully. Notice it in verses 3-4. We pray with a very specific purpose: "Praying also for us..."—Paul is including himself, and maybe Timothy and other companions who are with him—"...that God would open unto us a door of utterance to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: that I may make it..."—that is, "the mystery of Christ" or "the word about Christ"—"...manifest as I ought to speak."

Too often when we pray, we don't pray specifically. We need to be faithful, watchful, thankful and purposeful. We need to pray specifically. Satan loves general prayers; you never know if God answers them. God says us to "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." So the door will be open.

What did Paul want them to pray for in this passage? Two things in this text. First, verse 3, that God would open a door to speak; "that God would open unto us a door of utterance." The word "utterance" actually means "a word"; that God would open a door for them to share or to speak a word. At this time, Paul is in prison—he mentions his "bonds"—but he doesn't pray that he would get out of prison; he prays that God would open a door for him to share Christ, to preach the Gospel. If Paul is in prison, he is witnessing to everyone he contacts, which is why God put him in prison in the first place. Wherever Paul found himself, he always wanted to share and make Christ known to others.

I believe that we can do the same. I believe that we should pray for our spiritual leaders, our pastors, but we should also pray for ourselves. Every morning when we get up we should pray, "Lord, open a door for me to speak about you to someone today." Someone at the grocery store, someone at work, someone in the neighborhood or someone we encounter. "Lord, open the door to give me an opportunity to speak a word about You." When God opens that door, we need to step through it. God will open that door if we're faithful to ask Him. So pray that God opens a door to preach Christ.

In Romans 1:16, Paul says, "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ..."—why?—"...for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the

Greek.”

Secondly, Paul wanted them to pray for him to make the Gospel clear. Paul wanted God to open the door for him to speak the Gospel clearly. Verse 4 says, “...that I may make it manifest...”—or “clear”—“...as I ought to speak.” The NIV translation renders that, “Pray that I may proclaim it clearly as I should.” One of the great needs in the church today is that Christians would know the Gospel, that they would live the Gospel and that they would preach the Gospel.

Having prayed beforehand and knowing the Gospel, let me give you some simple, practical steps on how to share the Gospel. Number one, you need to present man's problem that he is a sinner under condemnation. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. There is no one righteous; no, not one,” the Bible says. I know that people don't like that, so you need to make sure your speech is always with grace and seasoned with salt. You need to present the Gospel tactfully. You don't just walk up to someone and say, “Do you know you're a sinner going to hell?! God bless you. Do you want to come to our church?” There may be a time and place for that, but you really need to be tactful, polite and respectful. You need to ask questions and listen and find out where they're coming from and share.

The second practical step is sharing the punishment for sin; that God is holy, righteous and He will punish sin. That is an element that many times is missing in the Gospel presentation. “The wages of sin is death. The soul who sins will surely die.”

The third step is sharing the provision that God in His love provided a Savior. First there is the problem of sin—we are all sinners separated from God, and there is the punishment for our sin, but God sent His Son to die on the Cross to take our punishment. That is the provision: God provided a Savior. When Jesus died on the Cross, He actually took your place and my place. The death of Jesus Christ was a substitution; He died for you and me. I should have died, because I'm the sinner. He's the Savior, but He took my sin and paid its penalty.

Lastly, how do we receive salvation? What is the personal appropriation? We must repent, turn from our sins, believe in Jesus by faith and receive Him. The Bible says, “As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.” So you explain that we're sinners, that God is holy, that He provided a Savior at the Cross and that you must trust Jesus Christ.

If you are going to be effective in sharing the Gospel, every Christian should commit to memory Ephesians 2:8-9: “By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” You don't have to quote it; just share what the verse means. Let it flow out as you share the good news with others. John 3:16 is another great verse to use in making the Gospel clear. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Memorize this verse and share the good news, and pray that God would help you make it clear.

The second step in becoming an effective witness is to walk wisely. Verse 5 tells us how to live. It says, "Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside..."—that refers to non-Christians—"...redeeming the time," which means all the time I need to buy up opportunities to share the good news. The word "walk" here is a figure of speech. Paul's not saying we have to literally go out and walk around. He's talking about our conduct. He's telling us that our conduct should be wise; we should have wisdom from above in knowing how to reach people when we are witnessing to them.

What are the ways to "walk in wisdom"? First, our walk needs to be consistent and daily. The word "walk" is a present, active imperative. Like the word "continue," it's a command in the present tense. It's not an option; you're to be continually conducting yourself wisely.

Secondly, you are to live continuously and tactfully by fearing God. Proverbs 1:7 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." And we are to obey God. These two elements are very important. "I reverence and respect God, and I obediently follow His Word." Then you'll be an effective witness.

Thirdly, we are to live righteously before unbelievers. Verse 5 says, "toward those who are outside." We are to live attractively before unbelievers and live with a sense of urgency. Again, verse 5 says, "redeeming the time." The word "redeem" means "to buy up." Don't put it off. Time is one of the most precious commodities we have. We all say, "I don't have enough time." But we all have the same amount of time. It's not the amount of time that's important; it's what we do with the time we have that is important. We waste time. We don't buy up the time.

To buy up the time is like what happens when you see something on sale. Why is it that something that is on sale is only on sale today? Today in San Diego canned corn is on sale. So we get in the car, drive to San Diego, we buy the corn and save 10 cents on each can. We're going to spend \$60.00 in gas, but we'll save some money. We're so fanatic about something on sale. We don't need it, but it's on sale so let's buy it. So we buy up when we have that window of opportunity.

Make the most of a window of opportunity. Right now we can tell our family, our friends, our coworkers about Jesus. That person you're sitting next to in that cubicle at work could die of a heart attack. "Oh, I should have told them!" That friend you've been thinking about—"I should really tell them about Jesus." They could die in an automobile accident. Don't put it off. Don't procrastinate. Redeem the time; buy up the opportunities. Be praying, be walking in and living the Christian life.

The third and last step in becoming an effective witness is to speak graciously. So the three ways to be an effective witness are to pray, walk wisely and to speak graciously. Paul tells us how to pray in verses 2-4, how to live in verse 5 and how to speak in verse 6. How are we to speak? Verse 6 tells us how to speak. It says, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt." It would be a little easier if that word "always" wasn't in that verse. James 3:8 says, "No one can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." The most

ferocious beast on planet earth makes its den right behind the human teeth; it's the tongue. It is so hard to always open my mouth "with grace, seasoned with salt." Why should we do that? "...that you may know how you ought to answer each one."

So to be an effective witness I must pray right, live right and talk right. The unbelieving world is not only watching, but they are listening.

Notice what our speech needs to be like, verse 6: first, "always...with grace." It means pleasant, attractive, charming and winsome speech. That should always be the case; even when people rail on me, I'm not to rail back or revile them. Second, my speech needs to be "seasoned with salt." Someone said this is Paul's recipe for speech. It means that you are to speak pure words, and you are to speak words that are attractive. Salt purifies; it is used as a purifying agent. Salt also adds spice. So our words are to be attractive and pure.

Never is there a time for a Christian to use vulgarity. It should never come out of a believer's mouth. The Bible says, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." If there are words coming out of your mouth that are displeasing to the Lord, then you need to get your heart right with God. If it's in the well, it'll come up in the bucket. You need to spend time in prayer—that will affect the way you live—then you need to be filled with the Spirit, and that will affect the way you speak.

So always be gracious, always season your speech with salt and thirdly, always be ready to answer. Verse 6, "...that you may know how you ought to answer each one." The Bible tells us in 1 Peter 3:15, "Always be ready to give a defense..."—or "answer"—"...to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness..."—or "humility"—"...and fear" or "respect."

Peter is recording these words for us in his epistle, because he knew what the outcome was of not praying in the Garden and then denying the Lord. He cursed and swore, saying, "I do not know Him!" Peter wasn't a good witness; he really blew it. Then Peter went out and "wept bitterly," but he came back and said, "God, I'm sorry! Please forgive me." The Bible says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

How can you speak graciously? Ephesians 5:18-20 says, "Be filled with the Spirit." When the Holy Spirit fills your heart, He takes control of your words. You'll be "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

In light of this text, we should all pray, "God, help me to pray. Help me to be a person of prayer. Help me to walk in wisdom. Help me to speak graciously; guard my words."

Do you want a prayerful, thankful, overflowing heart? Do you want a wise walk? Surrender your life to Jesus Christ and be filled with the Holy Spirit.