

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **Pursuing God in Our World Colossians 4:2-6**

What a wonderful time of singing, we have a true blessing to be able to share that together. I hope that your singing was sincere. If we want to be holy, if we want to be righteous, we must not just stop doing certain things, but we must start doing other things. We must replace sin and pursue righteousness, we'll be talking about that this morning. We will be looking at a passage of instruction on how we should conduct ourselves, what we should be doing as we pursue righteousness.

This actually fits in well with Dale's messages the last couple of weeks, he's been going through John chapter 1 dealing with John the Baptist. He talked about two essentials of witnessing. If you recall the first one was humility, that's the character of a witness. Then the next week was the content of a witness, that is to be able to preach the true Christ and what He truly did in His offering for us as the Lamb of God.

And today we will look at how to conduct ourselves as a witness from Colossians 4:2-6 where we are finishing up the book of Colossians. We are almost at the end, we've gone through 13 of the 14 messages that I'll be giving in this book, and Colossians 4:2-6 is our text this morning

It actually builds on all of what's come before it. The first chapter started with grounding the church in the truth. That is who Christ is and what He has done to reconcile the world to Himself as the one and only begotten Son that God sent to deliver us from sin. But there is a lot of people who want to twist this with worldly ideas, even cloaked in religious clothing. Chapter 2 is designed to guard the church from these worldly philosophies and errors that can cause us to be thinking wrongly.

Then we moved to Colossians 3. The first 17 verses of Colossians 3 grows the church in its relationship to God. We are developed as we set our mind on things above not on the things on earth. The beginning of the chapter says if you've been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above where Christ is. So if we have this mental mindset of devoting our thoughts to the Lord then we can be in a position to see righteousness in our life. Verses 5-11 are the things that we put off, verses 12 to 17 are things that we should be putting on.

Then the rest of this chapter deals with our relationship to others. We are growing in our relationships to others whether it is in our family or our work place.

Now this morning we will look at pursuing God in our world. This is really a mandate for us. Jesus left these words for us, to go and make disciples of all the nations. This is not just one more thing, it is the climax of what God has called us to do, to commission us to do this.

And in a way I think that just as you realize Christ in your life and have that change your whole being and your whole outlook on life itself, this will change your outlook on your purpose in life. In a real way I think it's like a second conversion. It's a way to change your whole purpose of life.

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Your design isn't just to be better as your own individual person, but to help others in their knowledge of the true God and to follow Him, to devote yourself to this.

There is two ways that we are going to be looking at you devoting yourself to this, this morning. The first one is going to be in prayer.

The first three verses we will be dealing with, verses 2-4, how to be prayerful in this, and then verses 5-6 is to be prudent in this as we conduct ourselves with wisdom. So we'll look at the first part, being prayerful.

This breaks down from verse 2 then verses 3-4 we'll look at how to pray. We are to devote ourselves to prayer. We are to pray with devotedness, being consistent.

It is really important that when we pray we don't just pray casually or carelessly, we actually are committed to this task. And why? Because prayer is the means by which God has chosen to bring change into the lives of people. For some reason God has designed us to pray for bringing about change.

You know the adage "prayer changes things?" Well it may be in reality that prayer changes people and people change things and in God working through prayer, He brings about the ability to minister effectively. This is why Paul asked this church in Colossi to devote themselves to prayer for him.

Now if Paul needed prayer, how much more do you and I need prayer as we go about trying to bring the gospel to the world around us? So we must devote ourselves to this, not just for our sake but for others sake that we can join together in bringing God's message to the world. We can support each other, we can work together in that and that requires devotedness, consistency.

Then the second phrase in verse two is **"keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving."** This is this call to alertness, to be circumspect, to be careful, watchful, alert. As you are going about the day this is something you should do, be alert to opportunities. Not only opportunities you have, but that other people who are believers that you know. They could have a ministry in the lives of somebody who doesn't know Christ, can be built up in prayer to minister effectively. And we need each other in this.

So with alertness means not just in the morning at a special time we pray but throughout the day. We turn our thoughts into prayer and to be able to communicate with God throughout the day, alertly, on guard. So that's how we should pray, we should be devoting ourselves alertly to prayer.

Now what do we pray for? That's in verse 3, what we pray for, **"praying at the same time for us as well that God may open up to us a door for the word so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ for which I have also been imprisoned."**

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So there is three elements here of what to pray for. As you seek to pray to support one another in the ministry of the gospel and to develop your own ability in this, here's what you should pray for:

First pray for the opportunities. Because this is not something that can be done by yourself. You need to have the opportunities for the doors to be open so that people will give a hearing to this message. It is indeed God's Spirit that is at work in peoples' lives and we can pray that we'll have that opportunity to be the right person at the right time. Or the people we know will have the opportunity to come along to help people know Christ as we've come to know Him. So, pray that the door may be open. Without those opportunities doors are closed and ministry is not going to be effective. We must be careful in taking those opportunities.

Now our opportunities hopefully can be increasing as we go along, not decreasing. We should seek and pray that we will have more opportunities and others will have more opportunities that our relationships for Christ will increase.

I realize that as you get older a phenomenon happens and that is your peers become a little less interested in spiritual things. They get a little less interested in everything that's different. They get a little more set in their ways. People in their forties are a little more set in their ways than people in their twenties and people in their sixties are a little more set in their ways than people in their forties and this is just how it is. Now that's a general statement that may not be true for every person. It isn't true for every person, so there still are opportunities but as you get older you may be aware that you're having less real ability to minister to these people who are your peers as far as age goes.

So what do you do in this and still have opportunities to increase it. Here's my suggestion. Younger people are more receptive and so you can not only be ministering to your peers, which you should, to have more opportunities and seek to have more opportunities, but think of the younger people who may look to you in a different way then they will look to their peers and that would be a great avenue of opportunity to be able to move the gospel message into the lives of others. Now you have a little better ability to go downward in age then many younger people have to go upward in age. Pray for opportunities that these may come about.

Next thing is to pray for communication. **Verse 4 says, "in order that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak."** Here is Paul asking for prayer that he may make it clear. How much more do you and I need prayer that we may make it clear. Clarity is an essential need for our ministry to non-Christians. We need to be able to clearly explain what it is that Christ has done. Pray for communication.

This isn't just going to happen, it takes some effort. It takes some work because we tend to just think we know what we are talking about and that it's going to be making sense to other people because we think they think like we think.

I want to give you an illustration, I think this is appropriate to people who are trying to communicate for Christ, it's very similar. This is, I don't know if you recognize him, he one of the greatest managers in baseball history, Casey Stengel. He communicated in a way that was called Stengelese.

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There was one time when he was giving testimony before congress and they were asking him about the antitrust law and how that applied to baseball, that eventually turned into the free agency that we see today in baseball. They asked him to testify about this and I'm going to give you what his testimony was:

*Congressman: I was asking you sir why it is that baseball wants this bill passed.*

*Stengel: I would say I wouldn't know but I would say the reason why they'd want it passed is to keep baseball going as the highest baseball sport that has gone into baseball and from the baseball angle. I'm not gonna speak of any other sport, I'm not in here to argue about other sports I'm in the baseball business. Its been run cleaner than any baseball business that was ever put out of the hundred years at the present time.*

*Congressman: Well Mr. Mantle, do you have any observations with reference to the applicability to the anti-trust laws to baseball?*

*Mantle: My views are just about the same as Casey's. (Laughter)*

Mantle says in other words, "I don't know what he said and whatever he said I agree with because he probably knows more about this than I do." So how often do we think, "well this other guy next to me he must know more than I do. So even though it doesn't make a whole lot of sense to me what ever he said I agree with that too."

We must continue to, through our life, develop a better and better ability to speak clearly. Just because you think you know what you are talking about doesn't mean the other people are going to think that you are clear. So we need to be thinking not only about ourselves and what we have in our mind, but how to explain that so people who are listening can understand it. Understanding, that is a critical issue. Be clear.

The next thing is perseverance. Perseverance. Pray for perseverance. Paul says, "**so we may speak forth the ministry of Christ for which I have been imprisoned.**" Now he has been imprisoned in the process of proclaiming Christ. So he has great limitations, it appears, but he is undaunted in his ministry. He is still seeing the need to have opportunities to minister the gospel.

And difficulties may come your way and because Jesus said, "**blessed are you when men persecute you and ostracize you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on account of me**" in **Matthew 5:11**. So we should be persevering when we have difficulties in our ministry.

People may not always receive what we are trying to communicate very well. But like Paul we can persevere in this, even to the point, in his life, to being imprisoned, because his imprisonment did not short-circuit his ministry. In fact, even in prison he was writing these words, which we now have today. So the Word of God is not bound by our circumstances. It can still go forward if we'll pray that we'll have the opportunity and others will have the opportunities. We must come before the Lord consistently to pray that we as a church can be better and better by communicating Christ to the world.

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Now our next section is being prudent. How to do this with wisdom? **“Conduct yourselves with wisdom towards outsiders,” verse 5.** We must do this. In our world we have to conduct ourselves with wisdom. We have to conduct ourselves in the world with wisdom in our activities, we must be wise in the things we do.

Now this verse presupposes something. It presupposes that there are actually people in the world that we are conducting ourselves around. So it presupposes we are not isolationists or that we are separated from the world around us. We must be engaged with people who don't know Christ.

So that presupposes that you are around people that don't know Him. If you aren't, if you have to think about who are these people that I can minister to that don't know Christ, you ought to be praying more and more for opportunities even more for that.

But in addition to isolation we must avoid iniquity, this is even in the context of this book. If we are going to conduct ourselves with wisdom towards outsiders we cannot be sinning, we cannot be a black mark on the message. We cannot put up these barriers of hypocrisy because of our sinfulness. This not only affects you, this affects the rest of us too. Because when you are representing Christ as an ambassador, and you are conducting yourself in iniquity, then it makes it a little harder for the rest of us with the people you are communicating to because they will think we're just like you, sinful and rebellious. So be careful to not be isolationist or living in iniquity.

And the last thing is to avoid insensitivity. To conduct yourselves with wisdom rather than with foolishness. And with each person there are sensitivities they may have that we might need to adjust ourselves in.

Paul said this in 1 Corinthians 9:22 he says, **“I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some. To the Jew I have become a Jew to the Greek I have become a Greek.”** We must be avoiding ways that we think we have the right to act a certain way, conduct ourselves this way, and have that become a barrier to our message that we are trying to get across. Because that is the most important thing we are trying to do in these relationships we have with non-Christians is communicate that message well. If we are doing things that are foolish and undermining that message we must remove that barrier.

So in our world we must be wise in activity we also must be wise in our opportunity. This is coming from this phrase **“making the most of the opportunity. To conduct yourselves towards outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.”** We not only have to pray for the opportunity, but when we get the opportunity we must make the most of it.

Making the most of the opportunity is rendered in some of your translations, “redeeming the time,” and it literally means redeeming the time. That is a good translation of the literal word. However, there are two Greek words for time. This word for time refers to a period of time not a point in time. So as it refers to a period of time, opportunity is probably the most meaningful, accurate translation.

Pray for the opportunity in the period of time that we have, or the season of time that we have, with individuals as they move into our lives from different ways.

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We have an opportunity and we should make the most of it because as you have probably seen in your life there will be many people that are moving in for a time. It maybe a day, it maybe a week, it may be two years. But they are moving across your path and you have an opportunity, make the most of it. Conduct yourselves with wisdom making the most of it.

How do you make the most of it? Well, first we must avoid idleness. Making the most of it means we actually do something. We don't just let this opportunity come and pass and do nothing. We have to be active rather than passive. We can't just hope maybe they will come up to us and say "tell me more about Christianity," because they may not and that will be an opportunity that will pass you by. You have to be developing in how to communicate proactively rather than just reactively.

But the next thing is to avoid ineffectiveness. As you are conducting yourself with wisdom there is some ways that are more effective and some ways that are less effective in being clear, in being compelling. And if we want to know how to be more effective in engaging people who we know who don't know Christ, verse six gives us the answer. Verse six helps us to understand what being effective is all about. **"Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt so that you may know how you should respond to each person."** So if you are going to conduct yourself with wisdom and make the most of the opportunity do verse six.

So let's look at this in our conversations with the world. We will examine verse six to make the most of your opportunities. Pray that you will have more opportunities, but as you have those opportunities that you also will be redeeming the time in the most of that opportunity.

The first thing is let your speech always be with grace, be gracious. In all your speech being gracious is the opposite of being judgmental. Jesus says this in John 3:17 that He did not come to judge the world but to save the world. I would suggest that we not only need to memorize John 3:16, **"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him cannot perish but have everlasting life."** We also need to memorize verse 17, **"Don't think that I came to judge the world, I did not come to judge the world but to save."**

This is our mandate, to bring these words of Jesus to the world for salvation as opposed for judgment. He's coming one day to judge the world and to fix all the mess, but for the moment He's come to bring salvation to the world and we are the ambassadors of this message.

Therefore we must avoid moralism. Moralism is where we are more concerned about changing the life styles of non-Christians then we are in changing the beliefs of non-Christians. Where we want them to act in certain ways that are more godly and we communicate the ways they are not acting godly.

This has served in our day and age as a significant barrier to the gospel ministry because we can be perceived as being only interested in legislating or changing their behavior. And really whether their behavior changes or doesn't change does not at all effect their eternal destiny whatsoever. So we could make them good church people but we haven't seen any real change in their heart. We must not fall into that trap, but to bring the message that brings true change from the inside out.

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That's the message of salvation, that Jesus has come to die for their sin and if they receive Him they can have eternal life, if they believe in Him, if they follow Him. So be gracious not judgmental, there is no need to be judgmental.

Who has the role of convicting the people who don't know Christ of sin? The Holy Spirit has the role of convicting them of sin. John 16:8, Jesus says when He, the Holy Spirit, comes He will convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. So there is no need for us to take the role of the Holy Spirit to seek to convict people of sin and righteousness and judgment. God convicts them of sin, righteousness and judgment

Sin is not something, as you may have noticed, that people can be easily convicted of. Apart from God's work in their life where the scales come off of their eyes and they really see that their sin is a big deal and they need a Savior. Be gracious in your speech.

The next thing is with salt. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt. What's salt? It's a preservative, but in this passage it's not. It's a seasoning. So we should be interesting. "Seasoned" because salt in Colossians 4:6 is used for the purpose of seasoning, a figure of speech referring to words that are appealing to the hearer.

So if you are going to make a meal for someone and you are going to make it more enticing then you'll add seasoning to it. You are not going to dump a bucket of salt on it, that's not going to season it. You're going to season it with an appropriate amount to make it more interesting, make it more appealing.

So too our speech should always be with grace, we should always be gracious in our speech and as we are always giving the message of grace in various components in various ways we are seasoning it with salt by being interesting. That is at the right time giving the right amount of information about spiritual things. so that the people will want to listen and think it's interesting rather they then have just been hog tied to some monologue that they are stuck listening to. That is like dumping the salt on them.

Now there's a time when they're really wanting it and that's fantastic, the more information we can give the better. We're shooting for giving more and more information. But we must be careful in this and especially with the people we know and we relate with that have a chance to know us, who will be with them a little longer than just today. We should be seasoning our speech with grace like with salt, not just at one moment but throughout our conversations, thinking of ways to communicate the truth in appealing ways.

And the last phrase, **"so you may know how you should respond to each person,"** is perhaps the most intriguing. **"Let your speech always be with grace seasoned as it were with salt so you may know how you should respond to each person."**

Each person is different. We can't go about every person in the exact same way. we must avoid ritualism. We cannot treat everybody as the same way. Just like churches can be ritualistic and they will do the same thing every service in the same way or people have adopted their habits and they always do this the same way. It does not minister to individual unique people to always to the same thing with each person.

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You are a unique person. Other people are unique people. God has given you opportunity with some of those unique people that he hasn't given me. He's given you abilities to connect with people that He hasn't given somebody else. So as you consider this you have to learn how to adjust yourselves to the people you are communicating to. So we need to think about people here and we need to study them. We need to, if you will, be knowledgeable about them.

Now we in Bible churches have done a great thing. We have emphasized the study of God's Word and we study it aggressively, we hope, and that's wonderful. We should know the truth well so that when we get an opportunity to communicate the truth we can communicate the truth rather than just what our opinion is or what somebody may say. But we can't overlook another thing to study, and that is the people that we are looking to communicate to so that we may know how to respond to each person.

Each individual person requires some thought on what it is that can best help them to know the Lord. So that may be that instead of talking about XYZ we need to first talk about ABC. We may postpone XYZ to a later time when they are in a better position to hear it and understand it. We might first want to emphasize some other things that they can receive and understand which will put them in the position of understanding other things. But I can't give you specifics because people are so individual. It depends on their personality. It depends on their church background. It depends on not only the knowledge they have but the knowledge they think they have and the ways that they have been taught that are erroneous that may need to be worked with.

So we must be knowledgeable, we must be knowledgeable about what we need to communicate and we must be knowledgeable about the person we are seeking to communicate with. Our conversations must not only be opportune with regard to time, making the most of the opportunity, they must be opportune with regard to the person.

And as people go along there are times and perhaps you can identify this in your life when people are not quite as interested in hearing and then sometimes they are a little more interested in hearing. So people change, they are not stagnant. And so we are putting ourselves in the position, with our relationships, hopefully that we are expanding these relationships and developing more and more of these opportunities by God's will that we can be able to communicate well at the right time to each person.

This brings us to the next point I wanted to make. We must avoid decisionism. What that means is that we've got them on our timetable and we're going to seek to move them to some commitment, not on God's timetable, but on our timetable. So we will do things believing that these things need to be done to bring the right amount of pressure and tactics to their life to bring them to decisions.

You may wonder why is it that so many people make professions of faith and then they fall away, where did they all go? I think one reason they fall away is because of what we have done. What we have done is we have created a profession of faith without the understanding that is supporting that profession of faith. So that they say, "Oh yeah I agree with that, I believe that," and we say great let's pray and then we announce that we have a profession of faith. Maybe we do and maybe we don't, but the goal of our communication is not to create conversion, because we cannot create conversion. No matter what we do, we cannot convert anybody, right? **“With man its impossible, with God all things are possible.”**



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Our role is communication so we can make it clear in the way we ought to speak. So as we go about trying to seek to gain opportunities, to make the most of these opportunities, to make it clear and understandable to each person, we are not on a timetable. If it takes a day and they happen to be eagerly interested and God has been at work in their life when we come along, wonderful. But it may not take a day, it may take a week, it may take a year, I have no idea how long it may take with each person I try to talk to. But I'm willing to be patient, seeking to have opportunity to speak with grace, seasoned, as it were with salt, considering how they can best receive what needs to be communicated. Looking for the times when they want more and more information.

So suffice it to say this, in order to make the most of the opportunity we must not only have the opportunity but we also must know what to do with the opportunity. So you must pray that you have the opportunity. Pray that you and others will expand in their opportunities and when you get the opportunity be wise in your opportunity. Conduct yourself with wisdom so that your opportunities can be expanded and effective.

How do you do this? How is this done? There's a way that this is done that is irreplaceable. You cannot get away with doing this apart from on the job training. This is best learned on the job. Even if you don't know as much as you'd like to know, you can still get busy communicating with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt. Knowing how to respond to each person so that they can receive it and as you do that you will learn a little more and a little more.

*Now let us this text review  
I trust that you believe it's true  
It does apply to each of you  
Though those who follow are but few*

*Consistently devote yourselves to prayer  
Proving just how much you care  
In the gospel ministry you can share  
By going before God for others prepare*

*At all times be are on alert  
To pray for those who might convert  
If with the world or flesh you flirt  
As salt of the earth you'll be inert*

*Pray for an open door  
So the Lord will go before  
Then with the gospel you can implore  
That heaven will increase more and more*

*When Paul was imprisoned in chains  
He left an example that to you pertains  
In your limitations, this truth remains  
God's Word is not bound by man's constrains*

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*Your goal must be to make it clear  
When you speak from peer to peer  
Simple words show you're sincere  
If perhaps they have ears to hear*

*It's the gospel you ought to speak  
Even when you feel too weak  
Remember when chances are bleak  
It has more power than any technique*

*But in wisdom you must walk  
In order to support your talk  
Foolishness makes words taste like chalk  
Leading outsiders to balk*

*With every opportunity do your best  
It's your faithfulness that will be blessed  
There's no need to be a pest  
If God's at work, He'll do the rest*

*Let your speech be with grace  
There's no need to get on their case  
In your life this must take first place  
That the words of Christ they may embrace*

*To season your speech as it were with salt  
Means knowing when to bring it to a halt  
Avoid the example of those at fault  
Who speak to others with verbal assault*

*Learn how to respond to each one  
So that your faith they will not shun  
And when this life on earth is done  
One more soul for Christ was won*

*This morning when you leave your chair  
I hope you've become more aware  
God wants you to prepare with the Good News to share  
Even though it's rare, you're needed out there  
Let's close in prayer*

Lord we thank You that You have worked in our life to help us to understand so that Your words are clear in our mind. We pray that though they are clear in our mind, we can communicate them clearly to others so they can understand. And in their understanding we pray that Your Spirit will go before us so the opportunities we have will not only be expanding but be effective and we can see the opportunity to help others. Amen.