

The Gospel in 3 Circles

Colossians 4:2-6

Last week we finished our verse-by-verse study of Paul's letter to the Romans. And I am sure you are all ready to dive into another two-year study of another book of the Bible. Two weeks from today we will start a new series on the book of Daniel. So if you are one of those who likes to read ahead, I believe that is where we are going. Next Sunday is our fifth Sunday Sing so I will not be starting a new series today or next week. But instead, today I want us to take a few minutes for something a little different.

One of the key ideas in the book of Romans was the gospel. Remember that is how Paul started his letter in Romans 1:1 saying, **"Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called [to be] an apostle, separated to the gospel of God."** Remember that Paul had a great desire to go to Rome and beyond to preach the gospel—a desire which had gone unfulfilled for years. In Romans 1:15-16 he writes, **"So, as much as is in me, [I am] ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."**

In Romans 10:15 he quoted Isaiah writing, **"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!"** In chapter 15 he told about how he had fully preached the gospel wherever Christ was not yet named. And he told the Roman church his plans to come to them with the gospel writing in Rom. 15:29, **"But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ."**

The whole book of Romans gave in detail Paul's gospel, the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. Every week I tried to proclaim to you that gospel, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into the world to save sinners from death and hell. He paid the perfect price for our sin with His own blood on the cross and was raised to life on the third day so that as the living Lord He might give eternal life to all who repent and believe in Him.

Having heard that message every week for the last two years, I imagine that all of you know the gospel quite well, am I right? Do you know it well enough to be able to tell it to others? Could you sit down with someone who doesn't know Christ and very simply tell them the good news?

Most Christians either can't or they simply don't. A recent study conducted by LifeWay Research found 80 percent of those who attend church one or more times a month, believe they have a personal responsibility to share their faith, but most, 61 percent, have not told another person about how to become a Christian in the previous six months. And 48 percent haven't even invited another person to church in the past six months.

Most of us will have to admit that our statistics are not any better. We know we ought to proclaim the gospel, but we usually don't. What can we do about this?

Hang on because when we get to the end of today's message, I want to show you a simple way that you can present the gospel to anyone.

Now from the book of Acts and Paul's other letters we know that Paul did make it to Rome. And he was able to proclaim the gospel there, although he did so from prison. While he was in prison in Rome, Paul wrote several letters that we have in our New Testament: Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon. Today I want us to hear Paul's heart for proclaiming the gospel as he writes to the Colossian church from prison in Rome. These few verses will show us a Biblical foundation for telling the good news.

So please turn to Colossians 4:2-6:

2 Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving;

3 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,

4 that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.

5 Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time.

6 Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

Today let me just give you three quick instructions for proclaiming the gospel:

1. Pray for an open door.
2. Get ready to make the gospel clear.
3. Respond with Grace to each person.

1. Pray for an open door.

Notice verse 2, "**Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving.**" Paul goes on (4:3) to ask for prayer for his own witness, but these verses also apply to our witness: A private walk with God in prayer is the foundation for telling the gospel. He says, "**continue earnestly in prayer.**" That means we don't give up asking God for opportunities and we don't give up asking God to save people. We are watchful, vigilant.

And we pray with thanksgiving.

A life of thankfulness stems from appreciating what God has done for you in Christ. If we are going to pray for the lost...if we are going to engage them with the gospel... we must first stir up in ourselves a heart of thanksgiving by remembering what Jesus did for us on the cross. There are many things to be thankful for – our families, our freedom, provision – everything. But they all pale in comparison to the cross. Jesus rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into His glorious kingdom of life and joy and peace. Never forget that. Thank God every day for saving you.

Thankful, grateful people stand out in this world of negativity. Paul says (Phil. 2:14-15) that if you don't grumble and complain, you'll stand out as lights in this grumbling, complaining world. And so if you begin your day with thankful prayer,

and you exude that thankful attitude throughout the day, those around you will notice. It opens the door for verbal witness.

In verse 3 Paul asked for prayer that God would open the door for the word. Pray for God to open a door in that person's life for you to tell them the good news. Before you talk to a person about God, talk to God about that person.

There are open doors everywhere. People are hurting. People are broken. How many of you hear people every day complaining about things? They tell you about their health problems, their family problems, they complain about work, and being tired, and about politics and hundreds of other things. Listen, these are open doors for the gospel. Any time someone has a problem, Jesus is the solution. Problems are an open door.

When I hear people talk about these things I try to remember 3 questions that will help turn your conversation from their problems to Jesus.

3 questions you can ask in a spiritual conversation

1. Can I pray for you? (If they say yes, pray for them right then and there)
2. Would you consider yourself close to God or far from God? (Listen to their story)
3. Would you mind if I showed you a picture that changed my life and helped bring me closer to God?

So pray for an open door and be ready with your three question when the door opens.

2. Get ready to make the gospel clear.

Paul not only asked for prayer for an open door, but also that he might speak the gospel clearly. He writes in verses 3-4, **"to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak."**

God has to open the door, but we need the boldness to speak about Christ when the door opens. Let me ask you again, how many of you think you could clearly present the gospel to someone in a way that they could understand?

Verse 5 says, **"Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time."** A wise witness is on the alert to buy up opportunities to share Christ with lost people. Paul asked for prayer so that when God opened the door, he would speak forth the gospel. He was confined in prison, but he still was looking to buy up the opportunities. That should be our mindset as well.

3. Respond with Grace to each person.

Listen to verse 6, **"Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one."**

In light of Paul's repeated emphasis on grace, this probably means that our presentation of the gospel should be permeated with God's grace, the message that He gives salvation as a free gift to sinners who deserve His judgment. But, also, it includes speaking graciously to others. As a sinner who has received grace, you won't speak in a condescending or condemning manner to another

sinner. You will be kind and humble, letting the other person know that we're all sinners who would be on the way to hell, were it not for God's grace.

Let your speech always be ... "seasoned with salt." He doesn't mean to use "salty" language, as sailors use, of course! Salt had two main uses in Paul's day. It was used as a preservative from spoiling, which implies that our speech should be pure and free from corruption. It should show those whose lives are spoiled due to sin how they can be restored through the gospel. But, also, salt was used as a spice, to make food more tasty. Our presentation of the gospel should stimulate people's taste to want more.

Paul says that you must "know how you should respond to each person." One person may need to understand sin and judgment, whereas the next person may need to understand God's abundant grace for sinners who repent. Study Jesus' witnessing encounters in the gospels. He confronted the proud Pharisees, but was gentle (although He still dealt with sin) with those who knew they were guilty. Pray for wisdom as you speak, so that you will know how to respond to this person's unique needs.

Always keep in mind that every person's primary need is to meet Jesus Christ personally.

I promised you that I would end today's message by giving you a simple way for anyone to tell the good news to others, and all you need is a piece of paper and a pen or pencil.

As I said, I try to ask three questions when God opens a door for me:

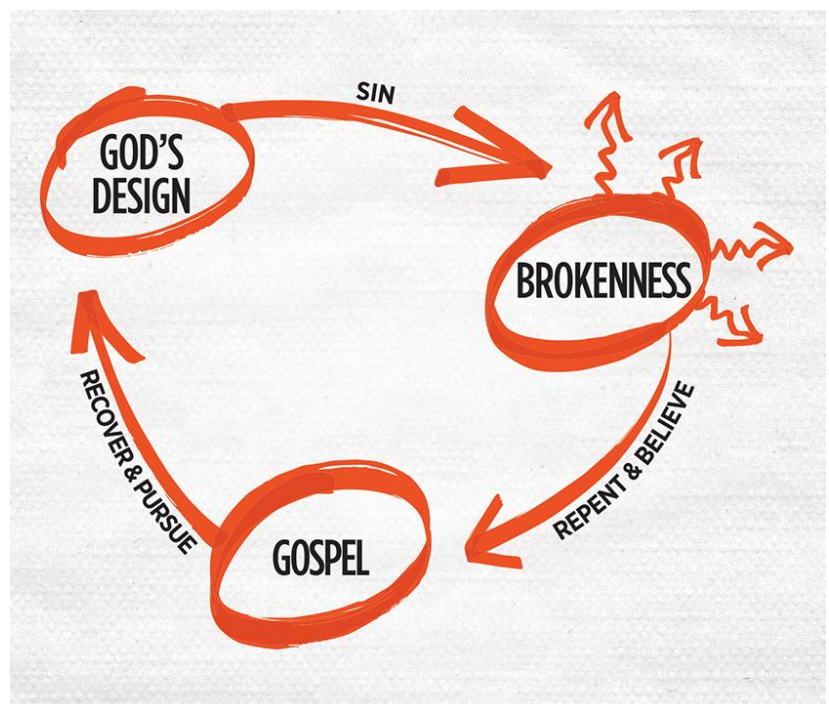
1. Can I pray for you? (If they say yes, pray for them right then and there)
2. Would you consider yourself close to God or far from God? (Listen to their story)
3. Would you mind if I showed you a picture that changed my life and helped bring me closer to God?

Here is what you can show them:

We live in a world filled with brokenness.

But that wasn't always the way it was, in the beginning God had a perfect design for this world (and for every person in it).

But we have gone from God's perfect design into brokenness by rebelling against God. The Bible calls that sin. Sin is anything that takes you away from God's perfect design. It is the disobedient nature that we have to go our own way apart from God.



Sin separates us from God and leads to death. That is how we got into this mess of brokenness. All of us sense this brokenness and we want to escape from it. People have devised all kinds of methods to try to get out of this brokenness. Some try religion and being good, trying to work their way to heaven. Some pour their life into family, or other relationships hoping to get rid of this feeling of brokenness. Others go a more dangerous path of substance abuse trying to numb their feeling of brokenness.

The problem is that when we have pursued all these kinds of things, they still leave us feeling broken, sometimes they leave us even more broken than when we started out. All our efforts out of brokenness fall short.

But God had a plan to restore us to a right relationship with him, to restore us back to his perfect design. God's plan is Jesus. See, Jesus is God and Jesus was also perfect. He came down to this earth to live as a man among us. Jesus taught us what God is really like and He gave many convincing proofs that He was the Son of God. But His main mission was to fix our brokenness, to restore us to God.

He did this by becoming our substitute and dying for our sins on the cross. The sinless Son of God paid the death penalty for our sin so that we could be reconciled to God. Three days after His death, Jesus rose from the dead, proving that He is the sinless Son of God. Because He is alive now, He can give eternal life and forgiven from sin to all who come to Him.

There are two things that Jesus asks us to do if we want to move from brokenness into God's perfect design. The first thing is to turn. Turn from our brokenness, turn from our sin. The Bible calls that repentance. We are sorry for our sin and turn away from our old life and turn toward God. The second thing He asks us to do is to believe. Believe that Jesus is Lord, the rightful King and Master. Believe that He died for my sin and rose from the dead to give me a new life. It means to trust Jesus to save you and to be Lord of your life.

When you take that step of faith to repent and believe, God saves you. He rescues you from the brokenness of sin so that you come into a perfect relationship with God in Jesus Christ. Your sins are forgiven. Christ Himself comes to live in you through His Holy Spirit. So that your new life in Christ will be characterized by two things:

Grow – You will grow in your relationship with God as you follow Jesus in obedience to Him. We grow through Bible reading and prayer, through fellowship with God's people in His church, through worship and witness.

Go – God sends those who have been reconciled to Him back into the world of brokenness to tell that good news to others.

Every single person is in one of two places. They are either in brokenness, or they are in Jesus Christ back on God's perfect design.