



Truths for Soul-Winners (Colossians 4:2–6)

In Colossians 4:2–6, Paul set forth some essential truths about soul-winning. Accepting and acting upon these principles will make an incredible difference in a person’s success as a soul-winner. Methods may change over time, but these truths are essential to real evangelism. If we embrace these truths, we will have more opportunities to study the Bible with people than we ever hoped to have!

BE DEVOTED TO PRAYER (4:2a)

The Colossian church was known for its faith, hope, love, and response to the gospel (1:4–6). Although they were growing, in chapter 4 Paul challenged the Christians to even greater growth. Where did he begin? He began where all great evangelistic efforts begin—with prayer (v. 2a). In fact, he talked about being “devoted” to prayer. What word would you use to describe your prayer life? Great soul-winners are *devoted* to prayer.

Paul said in Romans 9:1–3, “. . . I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.” Where did he develop such a passion for the lost? The first verse of the next chapter gives some of the answer: “Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation” (Romans 10:1). Notice the words “heart’s desire” and “prayer.” That sounds as if Paul was “devoted.” Not only was he devoted, but he was also specific. He prayed for their salvation, and he prayed for “them” in particular.

In my experience, the most effective soul-winners are those who pray devotedly, grate-

fully, specifically, and passionately. They seem to have opportunities everywhere they go. Christians who are not sharing their faith are likely not praying as they should either. All Christians should pray for opportunities to have Bible studies and then be patient and alert to the opportunities that God gives them. There is a valuable lesson in the story about a woman who lost a gold bracelet while riding a bus. She called the bus station and told them about her loss. The employee she was talking with asked her to “hold the line” while he looked for her bracelet. After a few minutes, he found the bracelet; but by the time he returned to the phone, she had grown impatient and hung up. Since she had not given her name, he could only wait for her to call again—but she never did. Do we pray to God for an evangelistic opportunity and then fail to “hold the line”; or are we patient, waiting for opportunities to teach others?

What should we say to God when we are praying for the lost? We can ask Him for the following:

- To help their spiritual eyes to be open (2 Corinthians 4:4)
- To help them come to their senses, escape the snares of the devil, and be set free (2 Timothy 2:25, 26)
- To give them hearing ears (Matthew 13:15)
- To send the right people into their lives (Matthew 9:38)
- To provide ways to build caring relationships (1 Corinthians 9:20–22)
- To give us boldness (Acts 2:29)
- To give us opportunities to have spiritual conversations (Colossians 4:3)
- To give us opportunities to invite them to a gospel meeting (Luke 14:23).

If we want this year to be filled with open

doors, boldness, and many of our friends, family, and loved ones coming to Christ, then we must be devoted to evangelistic prayer.

REALIZE THAT THE GOSPEL IS FOR ALL (4:3c)

In Colossians 4:3 Paul also mentioned “the mystery of Christ.” We are not left to guess what the mystery is; because in 1:27, 28, he wrote, “To whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Among other things, this mystery is the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles. It is the teaching of *every person*. In other words, *the gospel is for all*. Christians should not hesitate to share the gospel with anyone. People of every economic status, of every color, of every nation need Jesus. The one truth we should be able to agree on is the fact that Jesus wants everyone we meet to have an opportunity to hear the gospel. It is a serious mistake to prejudge who is or is not a seeker of truth.

Jesus’ First and Last Recorded Words

In life, first words and last words are important. I remember my two sons’ first words to me. First words are special. So are last words. My dad’s last words to me were from the spiritual song “I’ll Fly Away,” and those words are etched in my heart.

Much more significant are the first and last recorded words of Jesus. Among Jesus’ first recorded words in the Gospel of Mark are these: “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men” (Mark 1:17). Among His last words were “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15). In between the occasions when He spoke these words, He modeled the lifestyle of evangelism to which He was calling His followers.

Jesus knew when He was about to go back to heaven. He was in control of what was happening. What did He tell His disciples to do? Did He commission them to build buildings, schools, benevolent societies, or family ministries? All of these efforts are good, but they are not what Jesus commissioned. He told His disciples to be witnesses to the entire world (Acts 1:8). From these words we learn an important truth for soul-winners: *The gospel is for all*. Jesus wants

every person to hear the gospel. As a children’s song declares, “. . . red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight. . .” Any congregation or any Christian who does not embrace this truth is not being faithful to God.

By His teaching and by His life, Jesus demonstrated that He wants every person in the world to hear the gospel. Jesus modeled evangelistic passion:

Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest” (Matthew 9:35–38).

He showed unusual compassion for and confidence in ordinary people. The word for “compassion” in this passage means “a deep hurting.” Do you hurt deeply for the lost?

Jesus Was a Personal Evangelist

While Jesus practiced mass evangelism, He was also proficient at personal evangelism.¹ More than forty examples of Jesus’ personal evangelism are found in the Gospels. These accounts illustrate several important truths about how Jesus evangelized people. Jesus came to *seek* and to *save* the lost, and He did so. He intentionally set out to meet people and to save them—Zaccheus, for example (Luke 19:1–10). He was unapologetically evangelistic. He went where sinners were and attempted to save them. Even when the “saved” grumbled about it, He still associated with sinners in order to teach them (Luke 19:7).

Not only did Jesus approach sinners, but He also made sure that sinners could approach Him. Nicodemus came to Jesus by night as a seeker after truth (John 3). While Jesus’ bold teaching caused no immediate change in Nicodemus, John 7:50–52 and 19:39–42 seem to indicate that he later became a believer in Jesus.

Jesus made the most of every opportunity. In John 4 He demonstrated that the reason why

¹Much of this discussion is based on comments by Alvin L. Reid, *Introduction to Evangelism* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 30–34.

many people are not saved is that no one has ever told them how to be saved. Jesus demands that His church evangelize. The gospel is for all.

BE CONSCIOUS OF GOD, WHATEVER THE CIRCUMSTANCES (4:3d)

As Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians, he was in chains (4:3). Did he believe he had been abandoned or victimized? In 4:3b he asked the church to pray for open doors. He was confident that even his imprisonment would result in the preaching of the gospel. He saw God's providence in his circumstances. In Philippians 1:12, 13, he wrote about how his imprisonment had encouraged the brethren and had borne fruit among the praetorian guard.

We read in Matthew 28:18–20,

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Jesus promised to be with us in His Great Commission. We are not alone; God can and does use our circumstances for the preaching of the gospel.

We often find ourselves in awe of what God can do with our circumstances. In the words of a gospel hymn, "God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform."² A humorous and somewhat painful episode from my own life illustrates this. I dislocated my shoulder during an activity with the church youth group and needed a doctor to correct the problem. A few weeks later, it became dislocated again, and I had to visit the hospital emergency room in the middle of the night. The doctor medicated me and left the room to give the medicine time to work. I began to talk to the nurse who stayed in the room with me. My wife, Diane, later told me that I looked at the nurse and said, "Has anyone ever told you about my sweet Jesus?" I then proceeded to talk nonstop for several minutes, telling everything I knew about Jesus and the

²William Cowper, "God Moves in a Mysterious Way," *Songs of Faith and Praise*, comp. and ed. Alton H. Howard (West Monroe, La.: Howard Publishing Co., 1996).

local church of Christ. I must have gotten quite carried away. Diane finally looked right into my face and said, "Mike, please be still and let the medicine work." After a while, I quieted down. Sometime later, Diane noticed a visitor coming into the auditorium at church and thought she should know this guest. As she introduced herself, she told the visitor that she looked familiar and asked if they had met before. The young lady explained that she had been my nurse in the emergency room. If God can use the ravings of a barely conscious preacher, imagine what He can do with your circumstances.

Our God is an awesome God! Not all circumstances are pleasant; but if you will see God in them, your "chains" may result in opportunities to speak a word for Jesus. God does not perform miracles today, but He still works through His providence.

BE CLEAR IN YOUR PRESENTATION (4:4)

Many conflicting messages are at work in the world today. Paul's concern about teaching the Word was "that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak" (4:4). His desire to make the message "clear" should be shared by all who are seeking the lost. It is the message that sets us apart from others. Our confidence must not be in our methods, our talents, our good works, or our buildings, but in the pure gospel message. The Word of God is "living and active" (Hebrews 4:12). The gospel is powerful (Romans 1:16).

The One Thing We Have

Years ago I heard someone say, "The only thing we have that the world doesn't have is a story." At first I thought he was wrong, as I considered all the good works done by God's people. However, as I listened further, he pointed out that whatever good you can find in the church can also be found in the world. For example, relief efforts for tornado victims in Beebe, Arkansas, were led by the Lord's church in Searcy. The church of Christ was wonderfully loving in these efforts—but so were the Red Cross and other relief organizations. I am not underestimating the importance of good works (Matthew 5:13–16), but the non-Christian world has good works. You might say, "What about all the bad in the world?" That is a good point. Most

Christians I know lead exemplary lives—but notice that I said “most.” Unfortunately, whatever bad you can find in the world can also be found in the church, if you look for it. Really, the only thing that belongs to the church and cannot be duplicated by the world is the “old, old story of Jesus and His love.”³ Paul understood the importance of remaining focused on the message, and so must soul-winners today.

First Things First

All truth is important, vital, and necessary; but we must keep first things first. If we are to make the message plain, then we must focus on that which is of main importance. We cannot let the world or circumstances keep us from our primary task of making the message plain. Soul-winners know their priorities. What is most important?

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:1–4).

According to these verses, the gospel is of first importance. Secondary topics must not take priority over telling about Jesus and His love. We must be found making the message clear, not filling our studies with issues of lesser importance, until that which is of first importance has been taught. In our studies we must keep teaching how one scripturally becomes a Christian until he understands.

RECOGNIZE OPPORTUNITIES AS DIVINE APPOINTMENTS (4:5b)

Anyone who does not believe he has opportunities to speak a word for Jesus should hear the story of Aggie. Every Sunday, Aggie would say to me, “Don’t forget to lead my song, Michael.” “What song is that?” I would ask, feigning ignorance. “You know: ‘There Is a God,’” she would declare with a smile on her

³A. Catherine Hankey, “Tell Me the Old, Old Story,” *Songs of Faith and Praise*, comp. and ed. Alton H. Howard (West Monroe, La.: Howard Publishing Co., 1996).

face. Every time, Sunday after Sunday, I would get chill bumps watching her sing, loudly and from the depths of her heart, “There is a God.”

Even though I have not seen Aggie in over twenty years, I still think about her every time I sing those words. This woman loved to sing about God, and she loved to tell others about Him. It was not unusual for someone to visit worship services and say, “Aggie invited me to come to church.” I believe that several people will be in heaven because of her, and at least one preacher I know is more evangelistic and passionate about speaking a word for Jesus because of her example.

Aggie was unable to use tools like charts and worksheets, for she was completely paralyzed. Still, she made the most of her opportunities. She was an inviter, like the woman at the well in John 4, an inviter who said, “Come and see.” A remarkable number accepted her invitation.

Aggie’s example convinced me that anyone can win souls and that opportunities are everywhere. Like Aggie, we should accept responsibility for sharing Christ with the people we meet. God, through His providence, will bring opportunities for soul-winning into your life.⁴

White Fields

Jesus said, “The harvest is plentiful” (Luke 10:2a). Twenty-three years ago, my older son, Chad—then about six—burst in through the front door of our house shouting, “Mom, I’m going to be rich! I’ve found something to sell, and it’s everywhere—and people will buy it!” “What are you talking about?” Diane asked. She was a bit worried, seeing his hand full of pennies. “Come and see,” he replied as he grabbed his mother’s hand and pulled her out the door. Outside, she saw his little wagon, full of dirt. “It’s dirt, Mom, and it’s everywhere,” he said proudly. It seems that he had been going from door to door in our neighborhood selling dirt. I had to admire his faith and passion. Just like “dirt,” the lost are everywhere.

Who would question the need for involvement in evangelism throughout the world? I thank God for Christians who are literally going into all the world to preach the gospel. How-

⁴Darrell W. Robinson, *People Sharing Jesus* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 23.

ever, common sense dictates—and Scriptures teach—that our first responsibility is to those we meet, know, and love.

Do we find it easier to talk about Jesus with strangers than with our own families and friends? We influence each person we meet by what we do or do not do, by what we say or refrain from saying. Ezekiel was appointed by the Lord to be a watchman over those around him. He was accountable to “speak out to warn the wicked.” If he did so and they still died in their iniquity, then he was not responsible for their “blood” (Ezekiel 3:17–19). In other words, he was responsible for being faithful in sharing God’s message, whether they listened or not. The results belonged to God. We have the same responsibility. God is faithful, and He will do His part. We are successful when we obey God.

Divine Appointments

In order to bring a community to Christ, each member of the church must take advantage of every opportunity that God provides. When God opens a door, we do not have to knock and wait. Opportunities are divine appointments.

How can we make the most of our opportunities? Think about the people you see every day—when you go to work or school, when you buy food, when you talk with neighbors. Invite these people to join you at a worship service or a gospel meeting. Share a Christian book, speak a word for Jesus, offer a Bible correspondence course, or ask to schedule a Bible study. You cannot share with the wrong person. Every person you meet is either a Christian or a lost soul. If you reach out to someone who is already walking with Jesus, then you have found an opportunity to edify or encourage a brother or sister. Sometimes you will discover a fallen or discouraged brother.⁵ Whenever you find an opportunity to share God’s Word with someone, you can believe with full assurance that God has led you to that soul.

If we want to increase evangelism by the Lord’s church, we must stop believing in luck and start believing in God. Providence is a biblical idea. The seeking Savior is still seeking. You and I are His tools. God wants every Christian working for Him. The lost have everything

⁵Ibid., 24.

to gain and nothing to lose by your efforts.

Keeping Our Appointments

Jesus clearly taught that He would be with those who take the Great Commission seriously. The Savior who came to “seek and to save that which was lost” is still arranging opportunities for you to share the gospel, to invite, to encourage all kinds of people in all kinds of places.

Three truths must be accepted: (1) God is still seeking the lost (Luke 19:10; John 4:23); (2) the lost are still seeking God (Matthew 7:7, 8; Hebrews 11:6); and (3) Jesus wants Christians to seek the lost (Matthew 28:18–20). The only possible problem with this arrangement occurs when Christians fail to seek the lost. Opportunities are divine appointments. Will you keep your appointments?

CONCLUSION

Jack Exum used to say, “Soul-winning is not just what you do. It is who you are.” Methods are important. Thank God for the wide variety of evangelistic tools we have available to us today. However, even the best methods and tools are ineffective without a soul-winning mindset. We must see ourselves as God’s tools and our daily circumstances as great opportunities for evangelistic outreach. Soul-winning is a way of life. The Great Commission is not just about methods, but about men. It is His power, His message, His results. We are His partners, but He is the Lord. ❖

An Opportunity for Evangelism

Acts 8 tells about an Ethiopian eunuch who was trying to do God’s will. On his way home from worshiping in Jerusalem, he was reading from the prophet Isaiah (v. 28). God made sure that Philip was available to guide this man in his study.

Philip simply asked the man, “Do you understand what you are reading?” (v. 31). Evidently hoping to have some of his questions answered, the nobleman invited Philip into his chariot (v. 31). Philip explained Isaiah’s prophetic references to Jesus (vv. 32–35). We do not know all that Philip taught this man during their brief visit, but we are told that the man requested to be baptized into Christ (vv. 36, 37). This traveler was ready to accept God; all he needed was someone to show him the Way.