

Christ in Me

Ministry in Christ

Colossians 4:2-6

Sunday, March 22, 2026

Introduction (title slide)

Over the course of my life, God has put different people in my path that He wanted me to minister to. Sometimes I was faithful to do just that, but other times, not so much.

Studying our passage this week called to mind those in my life that I genuinely cared about or felt burdens for ... people that I would think about more often than others ... but that, for whatever numbers of reasons, I did not minister to them as the Lord would have me to. I didn't consistently pray for them as I ought to have, and I was not courageous enough to engage them in a conversation about their needs.

I carried a concern for them, but I did not possess a devotion to God for their welfare. I felt a certain responsibility for them, but I never took action. These are essentially missed opportunities that I live with.

Maybe you can relate? Maybe you've known people who needed the unwavering hope of Jesus ... maybe you've cared about a specific person or family that doesn't know the Lord ... maybe you've even felt a burden for them—but you've never really leaned in and prayed for them, much less engaged with them.

You believe the gospel matters. You want people to know the Lord. You care. You feel a responsibility. But too often you end up with concern without prayer and conviction without conversation.

(slide) Deep down, I think all Christians know that ***the gospel compels us to talk to God about people and to talk to people about God.***

This, in effect, is what Paul confirms for us at the end of his letter to the Colossian church. Having spoken to them about how the gospel impacts their individual lives, their church lives, their family lives, and their work lives, Paul ends his letter with guidance regarding how the gospel impacts their relationship with those who do not yet know the Lord. ***The gospel compels us to talk to God about people and to talk to people about God.***

Body

(slide) Let's talk about that first part. *The gospel compels us to talk to God about people.*

Look at vv. 2-4. *2 Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving. 3 At the same time, pray also for us that God may open a door to us for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains, 4 so that I may make it known as I should.*

What I love about these verses is that Paul tells us HOW to pray and WHAT to pray. Both are important. It's like a restaurant. What you eat is important, and how you experience the food is important. Paul recognizes that about prayer and tells us HOW to pray and WHAT to pray.

How to Talk to God about People

(slide) *First: persistently.* This is what he means when he says "Devote yourselves to prayer." Prayer to God on behalf of others is not meant to be occasional. It's not meant to be our last resort. It's not meant to be the thing we do when everything else has failed. Rather, Paul is describing a way of living. A posture of dependence. A steady, ongoing returning to God again and again and again. There ought to be a "stay with it-ness" when it comes to talking to God about others.

(same slide) *Second: watchfully.* He says in v. 2, "Stay alert in it." This is getting at our tendency to start something but not doing the things that are required to keep those things going and get them across the finish line. And the reason for this is because there really is opposition. There really are distractions.

(same slide) *Third: thankfully.* Paul adds at the end of v. 2 ... "with thanksgiving." If all we heard was "be steadfast" and "be watchful," prayer could start to sound tense. Heavy. Almost anxious. But Paul says prayer should also be marked by thanksgiving. But the fact of the matter is that we **do not talk to God about people** as if we are unsure who is in charge. We **do not talk to God about the people** in our lives as if the outcome finally rests on us. We **do not talk to God about these people** as if Jesus is still trying to win the decisive victory. Through his life, through his cross, through his resurrection, Jesus has already dealt the decisive blow to sin, death, and Satan. So yes, we pray persistently and watchfully, but not with panic. When **we talk to God about people**, we are not trying to convince a reluctant God to care. We are joining a God who is already at work.

Put these three together, and what we're really talking about is the gospel impacting **how we talk to God about people**. It gives us two things at the same time: **urgency**, because people need Christ, and **confidence**, because Christ has already won.

What to Say to God about People

He also tells them **what to talk to God about**. And what's striking is that Paul is not only asking for prayer for himself personally—he's asking for prayer for the advance of the gospel through those who are especially called to preach, teach, and carry the message forward.

(slide) First, pray for participants.

Paul says, *“At the same time, pray also for us...”* Paul is reminding the church that one of the ways believers participate in the mission is by praying for those who are on the front lines of gospel ministry. Not everyone has the same role, but everyone has a part. Some are uniquely called to give much of their lives to preaching, teaching, church planting, evangelizing, and missionary work. And the church is meant to uphold them in prayer.

So when **we talk to God about people**, we should not only pray for unbelievers in general; we should also pray for pastors, missionaries, church planters, and evangelists who are carrying the message of Christ to others. Every Christian ought to have some gospel workers they pray for specifically and regularly.

(same slide) Second, pray for open doors.

Paul continues: *“that God may open to us a door for the word...”*

Paul knows there is a difference between talking about Jesus in the normal flow of life and those particular moments when God creates an especially strategic opportunity for the gospel to move forward.

And notice this: **God opens the door**. That means we are not ultimately depending on charisma, cleverness, or human pressure. We are asking God to create opportunities that only he can create—to open hearts, to arrange circumstances, to make space for the word to be heard.

- God, open doors in our city.
- Open doors among our neighbors.
- Open doors for our missionaries.
- Open doors in hard places.
- Open doors no one else can open.

We pray for God-given opportunities for the gospel.

(same slide) Third, pray for clarity about Christ.

Then Paul says: *“to declare the mystery of Christ ... that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.”*

That's remarkable. Even Paul asks for prayer that he would be clear. This tells us something important about evangelism: ***the goal is not just that words are spoken, but that Christ is made plain.***

Fish and Directions

- Possible illustration (It's not clear to the speaker): "Mild, flaky, white fish."
- Possible illustration (Clarity is relative): "No one really asks for directions any more, but if you did ask someone how to get to Holland Youth Sports Complex from here, they could say, "Go east on West Broad and turn left on Hawthorne Avenue until it T's into Prince Avenue. Turn west and proceed to a northerly turn on Kathwood, then left on Newton Bridge Road and then left on Vincent Drive. Or "turn left at Caribou Coffee which used to be a Checkers" ... OR ...
 - 250 Vincent Dr, Athens, GA 30607

So when **we talk to God about people**, we should ask God not only for opportunities, but for clarity—that Christ would be explained plainly, faithfully, and powerfully.

Talking to People about God

But **talking to God about people** is not the whole assignment. **We are also to talk to people about God.**

(slide) In verses 5 and 6, Paul turns outward: ***“Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”***

Verse 4 acts as a sort of hinge between “talking to God about people” and “talking to people about God.” He’s telling us to pray about how to talk to people. So the content of what we should say to people has already been addressed. The content of what we say to people about God should be the clearly presented gospel. So the emphasis in v. 6 is not WHAT we say to people about God, but HOW we talk to people about God.

Look at v. 6. ***“Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”***

Not harsh. Not smug. Not careless. Gracious. And “seasoned with salt”—compelling, fitting, wise, alive. Why? “So that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” In other words, people are not projects, and witness is not mechanical. Christian witness is personal, discerning, and shaped by grace.

So the movement of this text is clear: bring people before God in prayer, and bring God's truth before people in conversation. The gospel compels both. *(slide) The gospel compels us to talk to God about people and to talk to people about God.*

Conclusion/Application

For Me

First, we stop keeping this general. We put a name on this text. Who has God placed in your life right now? Who do you care about? Who do you keep thinking about? Who feels far from God, but close to you? **For some of you, that Easter invite card in your seat is not just a piece of paper. It's a prompt. A next step. A way of saying, "Lord, I don't want my concern to remain vague. I want to move toward someone in love."**

So start where Paul starts: talk to God about that person. Pray for them by name. Be devoted in prayer. Stay alert in prayer. Give thanks in prayer. Ask God to open a door. Ask God to give you clarity. Ask God to work in ways you cannot see and do what you cannot do.

And then, as you pray, be ready. Stay available. Stay attentive. Don't force moments, but don't miss them either. If God opens a door, step through it. You do not need to be perfect. You do not need to be impressive. You do not need to have every answer. But you do need to be gracious. You do need to be wise. You do need to be willing.

But before we finish, we need to be very careful here.

Because if all you hear today is, "Pray more. Speak more. Try harder," then this sermon will either crush you with guilt or inflate you with pride. You'll either walk away thinking about all the people you didn't pray for, all the conversations you avoided, all the opportunities you missed—or you'll walk away thinking this is mainly about becoming a more effective Christian.

But the gospel is deeper than that. The gospel is not first a demand that you become a better minister. The gospel is first the good news that Jesus has come near to sinners like us.

Because the truth is, many of us have failed here. We have had concern without devotion. Conviction without conversation. We have cared, but not prayed. We have prayed, but not spoken. We know that we are supposed to **talk to God about people and people about God**, but we haven't.

And the good news is that Jesus came for people like that.

- He came for the prayerless.
- He came for the fearful.
- He came for the passive.
- He came for the self-protective.

- He did not wait for us to move toward him. He moved toward us.

In the deepest sense, we were the outsiders. We were the ones far off. We were the ones alienated from God. But Jesus Christ was cast out so that outsiders could be brought in. He was rejected so that we could be welcomed. He died in our place and rose again so that sinners could be forgiven, reconciled, and made new.

And even now, he is not done ministering. Right now, at the Father's right hand, Jesus intercedes for his people. Which means when you begin to talk to God about people, you are not entering God's presence alone. You come through Christ, with Christ, and because of Christ.

And when you speak to people about God, you do not do it from superiority. You do it from solidarity. You are not the insider looking down on outsiders. Apart from grace, you were an outsider too. So we don't move toward people with smugness. We move toward them with humility, patience, tenderness, and hope.

Church, that changes everything.

- We are free to pray because we are already welcomed in Christ.
- We are free to speak because our acceptance does not hang on the outcome.
- We are free to risk awkwardness because our identity is secure.
- We are free to love people without trying to control them, because only God can open hearts.

So yes—take the card. Pray for a name. Start the conversation. Step through the open door. But do not do it to prove something. Do it because Christ has loved you. Do it because Christ has come near to you. Do it because the grace that saved you now sends you.

For We

And this is who we want to be together. Not a church driven by guilt. Not a church trying to build a scoreboard. Not a church measuring faithfulness by visible success. We want to be a church so gripped by the grace of Jesus that prayer becomes our reflex and witness becomes love in motion.

That's why these Easter invite cards matter—not because the card is the mission, but because it may be one small step of love. And that's why this vision of 10,000 gospel conversations matters—not because numbers save anyone, but because we want to become a people who actually notice the opportunities God gives us and step into them with grace.

So let's be that kind of church.

- A church that talks to God about people because Christ intercedes for us.

- A church that talks to people about God because Christ has spoken grace to us.
- A church that moves toward outsiders because Jesus moved toward us when we were far off.

And as we rest in that grace, may God make us a people whose burden becomes prayer, whose prayer becomes readiness, and whose readiness becomes gracious conversation—for the glory of Christ and the good of our neighbors.

Prayer

Father,

Thank You that when we were far from You, You came near to us in Christ. Thank You that our hope is not in our performance, but in Jesus—who died for us, rose for us, and even now intercedes for us.

Forgive us for our prayerlessness, our fear, and our silence. Forgive us for caring about people without consistently bringing them to You, and for missing opportunities to speak of Christ.

By Your Spirit, make us a people who talk to You about people and talk to people about You. Give us persistence in prayer, wisdom in our words, and love for those far from You. Open doors for the gospel, and help us make Christ clear.

Make us a church shaped by grace, full of courage, and faithful in witness.

We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.