

January 9, 2022

Introduce

Good morning, Fathom. Happy New Year to everyone! As Kyle already mentioned, my name is Eric Shelly and I'm one of the elders here at the church

- So, this pandemic has brought us lots of firsts in terms of church life
 - Early in the pandemic, we pre-recorded our services and then streamed them online for people to watch at home
 - We held church meetings and d-group meetings via Zoom
 - We began streaming our in-person services for folks to view at home
 - And today, we're doing a video sermon for even those of you who are in person to watch
- I'm sorry I'm not with you in person this morning – believe me, I'd much rather preach in person rather than to an empty room like I'm doing now
- It's actually a little funny... when the pandemic started, I was still on sabbatical, and so I avoided having to preach to the empty room like Chris, Jon, and Gary did – [so maybe this is all just payback for that... I don't know](#)
- Anyway, as Kyle mentioned, my wife Anne and I tested positive for Covid in the middle of this week
- As of Friday morning, when we recorded this, my symptoms have largely gone away. Anne and my daughters have varying degrees of symptoms but overall, we're doing OK
- But even though my symptoms are clearing up, [we felt that rather than me standing up in front of you and talking and spitting all over the room for 40 minutes](#), that it would be better and safer to pre-record the sermon this week
- If the pandemic has taught us nothing else, it's to be flexible, so thanks for being flexible with this today!

Ok, grab your Bibles if you brought them. If you didn't bring a Bible, there is one beneath every chair.

- We're going to be in the book of Colossians today. Colossians chapter 4
- We say this each week, but we want each person here this morning to turn to the scripture passage on your own
- Don't simply take my word for it that this is what the Bible says... we want each of you to have the text in front of you and read it on your own

- Colossians 4 is on page 985 if you're using one of the bibles beneath your seats
- We'll be reading verses 2-6 of Colossians 4 today

INTRO

Well, if I was in the room with you today, I'd ask for a show of hands... but since I'm only on video, I'll simply ask you some questions.

- Did you make any New Year's resolutions for the coming year?
- Do any of you use the New Year as a fresh start, to make some new or better habits for yourself?
- Have you made any goals for the coming year?
- Have you made any resolutions for the coming year?
- Ok... be honest now... Its January 9th... [have you made a resolution 9 days ago that you've already given up on or already haven't kept?](#)

If you answered yes to that last question, don't feel too bad: I read last week that 80% of New Year's resolutions aren't kept. In other words, 4 out of 5 resolutions fail!

There's lots of reasons why resolutions don't get kept. Here are a few key reasons:¹

1. The first is that *A calendar change is a dumb time to make a life change*
 - This has always been my argument against New Year's resolutions – I'm all for resolutions,
 - but I'll make them when it's time for a change. Not just because it's a new year
 - Research shows that people should make life changes when they are fed up enough to make the change or realize that it's time for the change,
 - Not because the calendar changes to January 1st
2. Another reason resolutions fail is because they are *negative*, not positive
 - Many times, people resolve to *stop* doing something or *not* do something that's *bad for or unhealthy for* you:

¹ [https://www.forbes.com/sites/kathycaprino/2019/12/21/the-top-3-reasons-new-years-resolutions-fail-and-how-yours-can-succeed/?sh=558f1a406992;](https://www.forbes.com/sites/kathycaprino/2019/12/21/the-top-3-reasons-new-years-resolutions-fail-and-how-yours-can-succeed/?sh=558f1a406992)
<https://www.businessinsider.com/new-years-resolutions-failure-advice-jonathan-alpert-2018-12#:~:text=One%20of%20the%20biggest%20reasons,enough%2C%20Alpert%20told%20Business%20Insider.&text=%22It's%20easier%20to%20drop%20out,%2C%22%20Alpert%20told%20Business%20Insider.;>
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/what-mentally-strong-people-dont-do/201912/is-why-most-new-years-resolutions-fail>

- Stop snacking on sweets and junk food
- Stop drinking alcohol
- Spend less time on my phone
- Spend less time on social media
- Stop watching Netflix shows like *Tiger King*
- These things are all bad for you
- Instead, *positive* resolutions have a greater success rate:
 - Eat more veggies or fruit for snacks
 - Drink more water each day
 - Get more sleep
 - Read a book instead of screen time
- Positive goals or resolutions have a better success rate

3. Third, people lack the necessary steps to achieve their goals or resolutions

- They may have a resolution or goal, like losing weight
- But they don't know the changes or steps needed to lose that weight
- Some practical steps are needed to keep resolutions

Now it's probably not on everyone's list of New Year's resolutions, but I think most Christians would desire to share their faith more in the coming year

- I think most of us would love the opportunities to talk to a friend or a co-worker or a neighbor about Jesus
- I don't know many Christians who don't think it's important to share their faith or talk about their belief in Christ with others
- But I do know many Christians who – for one reason or another – don't share their faith often
- Is anyone with me on this?
- Does anyone desire to share their faith more and more openly in 2022?

Why is it a hard thing to do? Why is it hard for us to talk about Jesus with friends, co-workers, or neighbors?

- It's not that we're afraid of stating our opinions or convincing them about something
- We do this all the time

- *You should try that new restaurant... its great*
- *That show on Netflix is so good... you need to watch!*
- We'll recommend doctors, dentists, barbers, auto mechanics to others
 - *Oh, they're great. You should go there. They're the best*
 - We always think our person is the best
 - And we love telling others about how they are the best
- We're not shy about recommending things to others when we believe they are good things to recommend
- But we're shy and lack confidence in talking about our faith with others

There are lots of reasons why it's hard to share our faith, but I think the biggest reason is that we don't want to be seen as counterfeits

- I think that more than anything else, the thought of being seen as counterfeit or hypocritical
- Scares and prevents more Christians from sharing their faith, than anything else
- We don't want to be seen as the hypocritical Christian, the counterfeit Christian,
 - The ones that say they believe one thing, but then live and do another
 - The ones non-Christians love to point to when they criticize Christianity

We've all probably seen or experienced the hypocritical Christian in some way. And we've probably seen or experienced it recently

And so, I think that many Christians struggle not only with how to talk about our faith, but how to talk about our faith *confidently*

- So, instead of sharing confidently, authentically, and honestly
- We may overcompensate and share loudly, arrogantly, and ignorantly
 - Thinking that if we just make the point and get our argument out there, we've done our job
- Or, instead of actually engaging someone on a topic and genuinely trying to learn the other side's perspective
- We may do the opposite. We don't talk about our faith or beliefs at all

So, as we start 2022... as Christians... as followers of Christ... How do we talk to each other... and tell others about Jesus?

- In a way that honors and glorifies
- The God that we follow...
- In a confident, honest, and authentic manner

- Without fear of being hypocritical?
- Without being counterfeit?

Let's turn to our text and read what the Bible has to say about this.

In our passage today, Paul lays out for us some helpful and practical steps for how we can be confident when we talk to others about our faith.

CONTEXT: Colossians 4

As I mentioned, we'll be looking at Colossians 4 this morning, so let me set just a bit of context to this passage²:

- The apostle Paul is the writer of Colossians
- Paul is imprisoned in Rome when writing this letter and he's writing to the Christian church in the city of Colossae, which is in modern day Turkey
- And Paul is writing to challenge the church to place Christ as the head of all things in their lives

As Paul concludes his letter, he's summarizing some final instructions to the church and at the end of chapter 3, he gives a handful of brief instructions for various groups

- He instructs husbands and wives
- He instructs children and parents
- He instructs servants and masters (or employees and employers)
- And after the instructions to the specific groups, Paul gives some summary instructions for *all* people and *all* groups.
- And in those instructions are some practical steps to help us confidently and effectively share our faith and talk about our faith with outsiders

COLOSSIANS 4:2-4

Let's read verses 2-4 together. Starting in verse 2:

² Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. ³ At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— ⁴ that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

So, the first step that Paul gives us is to pray. The first step we can take to be confident in sharing our faith and in sharing the gospel is to **SLIDE Pray with Purpose**

Sharing our faith confidently requires and starts with prayer

² The Bible Project. *Overview: Colossians.*; Geisler, N. L. (1985). *Colossians*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 667). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

EXPLAIN How to Pray

- Paul gives us a short, concise instruction on how to pray with purpose:

Verse 2: **Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.**

- In fact, verse 2 may be worth committing to memory as it is an effective and brief model of a prayer life:

Paul gives us three approaches to prayer here:

Steadfast

The first is to **Continue steadfastly in prayer** **SLIDE Pray: Steadfast**

- This means that we *continue* in prayer. We don't stop and start... we continue
- In the Greek, the wording here means to *persevere*
- This doesn't mean that we are constantly on our knees, praying 24/7
- But it means that prayer is something we do regularly. It's a practice, a discipline, a habit. It is a discipline that we continue doing
- Most people pray in the bad times... when there are urgent, direct needs...
 - A family member is sick or in the hospital
 - A friend lost a job
 - A child is struggling in school
 - We pray in the hard times
- But Paul says to pray regardless of good times or hard times – we are to pray steadfastly, continuously
- Paul is saying that we need to pray continuously
 - We should pray continuously:
 - For opportunities to talk about our faith
 - For the ability and the words to explain what we believe and why we believe it
 - For the confidence and courage and boldness to share our faith
 - We should pray for these things continuously

Watchful

Next, Paul says we are to be **watchful** in prayer **SLIDE Pray: Watchful**

- We teach kids at a young age to pray with their eyes closed and hands folded their heads bowed

- But this is because kids have the attention spans of a gnat!!
- They can be all over the place
- My daughters have literally started eating, or reading, or drawing when I've prayed too long before meals!
 - They get distracted easily
 - They have short attention spans
 - So, we teach kids to close their eyes to pray – to avoid distraction
- Here, Paul seems to contradict that
- What he says conveys the idea of praying with your eyes open³
- But Paul is giving us figurative instruction here:
 - He isn't saying that we should simply pray with our eyes physically wide open
 - But He's saying that we are to be alert and attentive to the world around us... and then pray accordingly
 - We are to look for the things to pray for and the people to pray for
 - Those things form the purpose to our prayers
- In Mark 14, Jesus echoes this, where he tells the disciples to “watch and pray” in the garden
- We are to have our eyes open for things to pray for
 - We're to be paying attention,
 - looking for things to pray for
 - listening for things to pray for
 - Praying for opportunities to share our faith with others
 - Seeking purposeful prayer
- When we're looking for people to pray for and praying for opportunities to share our faith with those people
- God frequently grants us those exact opportunities
- God provides us with opportunities to share our faith when we're prayerfully watching for those opportunities
 - I've seen it in my life as I've prayed for my neighbors

³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament* (pp. 584–585). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

- And prayed for opportunities to talk about God with them
- When we pray watchfully, we're also ready, with our heart prepared and aligned to talk to others about our God and our faith
 - 1 Peter 3:15 says to always be ready to give the reason for the hope you have in Christ (paraphrase)
 - Praying watchfully helps us to always be ready and alert

Thanksgiving

Third, Paul says we are to pray **with thanksgiving** **SLIDE** **Pray: Thankful**

- Praying with thanksgiving is giving thanks in our prayer – regardless of the outcome
 - If God answers our prayers, just as we've asked Him to – we give thanks!
 - If God answers our prayers differently than we asked – we give thanks also!
 - Because He still answered our prayers!
 - If God makes us wait a long time before the prayers are answered – we still give thanks for that!
 - Because God works while we wait
- Being thankful combats selfishness in our hearts
 - Just like we teach our kids to say “thank you” when they receive something
 - We need to teach ourselves to say “thank you” to God for His gifts and answered prayers
- Thanksgiving and thankfulness put us in a proper position for continual prayer
- And so, Paul tells us to pray with thanksgiving. Making thanksgiving a regular part of our prayers

So that was a bit of a tangent on prayer – but it was too helpful of a teaching not to spend time on it

Next, in verses 3 and 4, Paul gives some more purpose to our prayers. Let's read these again:

³ At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— ⁴ that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

- The “us” Paul mentions here refers to Paul and his co-workers:
 - other preachers like Paul,

- but it's also other disciples
- others who are sharing their faith with those around them
- And he requests prayer for two things:
 1. That God would open doors for the gospel to be declared and
 2. That the gospel may be declared clearly

EXPLAIN: Open Door

So first, Paul says that we should pray that God opens doors for the word

- That God will open the door
- And create the opportunity, or situation, or conversation
- for the gospel to be shared

I think this issue explains some of the conversations Christians sometimes have

- Christians feel passionately about an issue...
- And they want to talk about it
- And so, they kick down the door
- Instead of praying for God to open the door
- Instead of prayerfully and thoughtfully approaching the conversation, they just rush into it
- Instead of asking God for the opportunity and the open door
 - They make the opportunity
 - And open the door themselves
- Most of the times, this results in unproductive conversations
 - That are very one-sided
 - The Christian speaks *at* the other person about God
 - And the other person likely tunes them out – not necessarily because of what they're saying... but *how* they're saying it
- Paul says to pray for God to open doors, not for us to open them
- Because Paul knows praying for God to open doors is more productive

EXPLAIN: Make it Clear

And the second thing Paul says we should pray for is in verse 4. Here, Paul tells us to pray for clarity when he shares the gospel

- Paul wants to be able to clearly declare the gospel of Christ
- Paul knows that what he's preaching about can be hard to understand. It's why in verse 3 he calls it a *mystery*!
- So, he asks the Colossians to pray for him to have clarity in his speech

Do you pray for your pastor, before coming to church on Sunday morning?

Have you ever prayed for him during the week while he was writing that week's sermon?

- You never know... He could have gotten Covid the week he's prepping to preach!!
- So, pray for your pastor as he prepares to preach each week

One commentator said this: **SLIDE**

Pray for your pastor as he prepares the Word, studies, and meditates. Pray that the Holy Spirit will give deeper insights into the truths of the Word. Pray too that your pastor will practice the Word that he preaches so that it will be real in his own life. As he preaches the message, pray that the Spirit will give him freedom of utterance, and that the Word will reach into hearts and minds in a powerful way.⁴

So, we should pray for pastors and preachers and teachers in the church, that they would speak and share clearly.

But we should also pray for others who may share the gospel in their daily lives that they also may do it clearly

- Because it's one thing to know the gospel and know what we believe
- It's another thing to tell others about it and communicate it to others clearly
- In a world where people are told to "find your truth" and "live in your truth" and to "follow your heart"
- If it isn't explained clearly, the gospel could simply come across as some Christian self-help
- So, Paul says to pray that those sharing their faith – those sharing the mystery of Christ – will clearly communicate the gospel and its power

ILLUSTRATE: Tappers and Listeners

⁴ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 145–148). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

I read about an experiment⁵ that a psychologist ran where people were divided into 2 groups: one group was “tappers” and the other was “listeners”

- The tapper’s job was to tap out the rhythm of well-known songs (songs like “Happy Birthday” or “Jingle Bells”)
- The listener’s job was to listen and identify the song being tapped
- At the start of the experiment, Tappers predicted that their song would get identified 50% of the time... because the songs were so familiar
- But the results of the experiment were that listeners only identified the song 3% of the time*

Why such a big discrepancy? Why was it so hard for the listener to identify the song?

- It’s because when a tapper is tapping a song, they can hear it in their head and so their tapping follows that tune
- But the listener doesn’t have the tune in their head already...
 - They may be mentally flipping through hundreds or thousands of songs in their head
 - and trying to align their mental song catalogue with what is being tapped
- The tappers would get flabbergasted at how hard it was for the listeners to ID the song correctly. They thought it should be obvious
- This is called the Curse of Knowledge – where you know something well, but it is hard to explain it to someone who doesn’t have that knowledge

The same goes for sharing the gospel and sharing our faith:

- We may know what we believe well. We may know that Jesus died for our sins and forgave us of our sins
- We may know this very well and why it’s important
- But when it comes to sharing it with someone else
- Who doesn’t know it well, and who is surrounded other competing worldly ideas...
- It can become difficult. Even flabbergasting
- This is why we pray for clarity

⁵ Chip and Dan Heath, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*, Random House. *Actual results were 2.5% of time, not 3%

- Pray for clarity in your conversations
- Pray for clarity in the conversations of other Christians
- Pray for clarity in the communication and preaching of pastors
- We pray that we may make it clear, which as Paul says, is how we ought to speak.

So, Paul's first instruction to us is that we can be Confident... and share our faith confidently with others when we **SLIDE Pray with Purpose**.

- By praying steadfastly, watchfully, and thankfully
- By praying for opportunity and for open doors
- By praying for clarity

COLOSSIANS 4:5

Paul's next instruction to us comes in verse 5 which reads:

⁵Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.

EXPLAIN

Here, the second step Paul provides to help us share our faith confidently is to **SLIDE Walk Wisely**

- “Walk” here means how we live
 - Our daily life, conduct, our actions. All of it.
- Walking in *wisdom* or walking ‘wisely’ means that in all facets of our life, we strive to do the right thing
 - Sometimes the right things are the small things
 - Telling the truth
 - Paying your bills and paying them on-time
 - Obeying laws and rules
 - Not just selectively obeying the ones you agree with
 - Working a full day's work
 - With so many people working from home now
 - It's easier to take more time for yourself and less time for your job
 - While still being paid for a full day of work
 - Being Polite, being courteous

- Not gossiping
- [Returning your shopping cart to the cart corral at the store](#)
- These are all the right things to do
- Often times, *doing the right thing in small things is just as important as doing the right thing in big things*
- Paul tells us that to walk in wisdom is to do the right things
 - Knowing that God is watching
 - *And assuming that outsiders* are also watching
- “*Outsiders*” here refers to the world – to those outside of the church
 - We may call them non-believers or the unchurched
 - Paul calls them outsiders
- And he says we are to assume that they are watching how we live

ILLUSTRATE: Private Investigator

- I read a story⁶ about a pastor who moved to a new church in a new city
- One of the people in the city was skeptical of him and of his preaching
- So, the man hired a private investigator to follow the pastor around and report back to him about how the pastor actually lived
- The PI followed him and watched him for several weeks and then reported back to the man who hired him
- The PI reported that the pastor’s life consistently mirrored his preaching
- As a result of that report, the man who hired the PI became a believer
- The pastor walked wisely and it made a difference to the outsider who watched him

We never know who outside of the church is watching us

- And we never know how they are watching us or why
- [I highly doubt any of my neighbors have hired a PI to spy on me](#)
- But I do assume that they are watching how my family and I live and how we act
- So, we are to **Walk Wisely** before outsiders.

Walking wisely allows us to do what Paul instructs at the end of verse 5, which is to make **the best use of the time**

⁶ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 145–148). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

- The phrase, **making the best use of the time** means to “redeem the time”
- In other words, we can recover or reclaim the time or opportunity, for the gospel

When we pray watchfully and persistently and walk wisely towards outsiders, we can redeem every opportunity for Christ or for the kingdom

- Suddenly, borrowing a tool or a cup of sugar from your neighbor could be a kingdom event and not just a meaningless trip across the street
- Your interaction at the check-out counter of a store,
- or with your server at a restaurant,
- or with teachers, professors, bosses, employees
- ... they can all become conversations or interactions that can be reclaimed or redeemed for the gospel when we walk wisely **SLIDE Walk Wisely**
- Because we never know who may be watching us... or why

COLOSSIANS 4:6

Paul’s last instruction here is in verse 6. We read:

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

As we seek to be Confident in speaking to others, in telling others about our faith,

- Verses 2-4 addressed how we should *pray*.
- Verse 5 addressed how we should *live and walk*.
- Verse 6 finally addresses how we should *talk*.

Paul says in verse 6 that our speech should **be gracious**.

But, what does that mean? What does it mean for our speech to **be gracious**? The words *gracious* and *grace* have lots of uses:

- We say some athletes, or figure skaters, or ballerinas “move with grace” or “move graciously” or “gracefully”
- We say that someone “graced us with their presence”
- We say that someone “took the loss or the news graciously”
- To speak graciously means to have beauty, or eloquence, or honor, or politeness in our speech

But the idea that Scripture conveys is slightly different. The idea of speaking with grace appears in multiple places throughout scripture:

- Psalm 45:2 says **grace is poured upon your lips; therefore God has blessed you forever.**
 - Psalm 45 is a Psalm prophesying about the coming Messiah
 - It's saying that the Messiah will speak with grace
- In Luke 4:22, the apostle Luke states that Jesus fulfilled Psalm 45 when he says, **22 And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth.**
 - Jesus – the promised Messiah – spoke graciously
- In Ephesians 4, Paul is also addressing our speech. And throughout this chapter he says to:
 - 'speak the truth in love',
 - to 'speak the truth to our neighbor',
 - and to 'speak such as is good for building up'
 - 'let no corrupting talk come out of our mouths'
 - So that our speech **may give grace to those who hear**

The idea conveyed in scriptures is that our faith in Christ should be evident in how we talk as well as how we live and walk

- Our speech should reflect our lives in Christ and our beliefs in Christ
- People should be able to hear us talk and tell that we're Christ's disciples without us ever having to tell them that we're Christ's disciples
- They should be able to tell simply by how we talk
 - Because we're gracious, honest, sincere, authentic
 - We talk about subjects that are honorable, just, and pure

ILLUSTRATE: Anne's job

My wife Anne works for a large consulting firm with employees all over the country and all over the world

- And so, she works and talks with people whom she's never even met in person – only over the phone or on video
- But multiple times she's told me. "I had a conference call with so-and-so today. They talk like they're a believer" or "So-and-so always says things that makes me think she's a Christian"
- And as Anne has continued to work with these people, it would eventually come out through conversation that they are in fact believers

- On calls discussing IT consulting, their speech was gracious enough, that someone in another time zone, could tell that they were Christians

So, our words and our life should align. *Our talk should match our walk.* And vice versa

- There should not be any contradiction between the two
 - We should live wisely and speak graciously
 - Both towards those in our church family and towards those outside the church

Paul then mentions that our speech should be **seasoned with salt**. This is the third step that Paul suggests **SLIDE Salty Speech**

EXPLAIN: Salt for Flavor

If you do any cooking of any kind, you'll know that 1) salt is in important ingredient in many and most recipes, and 2) there are many kinds of salt

- There's just the normal, common plain table salt that's in most salt shakers
- But a quick Internet search listed many other different kinds of salt, including
 - Kosher salt
 - Gray salt
 - Pink salt
 - Sea salt
 - Himalayan salt
 - Hawaiian salt
 - Celtic sea salt
 - Smoked salt
 - Garlic salt
 - Celery salt
 - Habanero, chipotle, lemon, espresso salts
 - There's even **pepper salt** ... which I guess is just having your salt and pepper combined together?
 - It's either a really efficient idea, or a really dumb idea
 - I'm not quite sure which
- But the point is, there are lots of kinds of salt. But they all have primarily the same purpose: seasoning

- All of the different types of salts that I listed... are all used for the purpose of seasoning the dish
- And not just seasoning it, but seasoning it to make it *taste better*
- The seasoning *enhances the flavor* of the meal
- Our words should work the same way
- They should be gracious and point others to God,
- But they should also be savory and make the gospel attractive due to the graciousness in our speech
- Speech that is seasoned with salt doesn't just communicate about God, but it does so in a way that conveys the love of the gospel, the love of Jesus
- Our speech should enhance our testimony and our life's witness

EXPLAIN: Salt as Preservative

In Bible times, however, salt was not just used for enhancing taste, but it also had two other purposes which Paul is applying to our speech here

- The first is that salt was a **preservative**.
 - Remember, this was a time before refrigeration, so if you wanted to keep meat or something from going bad, you would cure it with salt
 - You would pack something in salt
 - Because salt would preserve the item longer, so it wouldn't spoil
 - Likewise, Paul says that our words should be seasoned with salt... so that what comes out of our mouths does not spoil our witness
 - We're not to utter any corrupting words or speech
 - Angry words, criticisms, gossip, insults, lies
 - These can all corrupt our speech when we talk with outsiders
 - One minute of speech can spoil or corrupt any previous witness and actions people may have seen from us
 - Our words can corrupt our walk just like uncured food can get corrupted and go bad
 - Our words should preserve and reinforce our walk, like salt preserves food

EXPLAIN: Salt for Worship

- Secondly, in Bible times, salt was also used **in sacrifices**

- Paul is suggesting here that our words are sacrifices offered to God⁷
- What percentage of your words would you say are pleasing to God?
 - What about the curse word that slips out when a driver cuts you off?
 - Disrespectfully talking about a politician?
 - Or crude jokes
 - Guys... this is an area of growth for many of us
 - I've seen how guys can talk when they get together...
 - Crude jokes, double entendre, none of it is worshipful
- Regardless of who we're talking to, considering our words as sacrifices can help us say things in a gracious manner
- Our words should be pleasing to God, our words should be worthy of worship
- So, our words are to be without blemish or stain. They are to be pleasing to God
- So, think about your speech. Think about the words you say each day
- The Internet told me that the average person speaks anywhere from 7,000 to 20,000 words a day
 - Now, I live in a home with three women, based on my experience in my household,
 - I'm assuming women are closer to the 20,000 words per day and men closer to the 7,000 words
 - But for simplicity, let's average it and say 14,000 words a day
 - If we considered all of the 14,000 words that we speak each day...
 - How would you describe them?
 - Do they enhance your wise walk?
 - Do they preserve your witness to outsiders?
 - Are they worshipful?
- Our speech should be seasoned with salt **SLIDE Salty Speech**
- The way we speak should be worshipful. It should enhance and preserve the way we live before outsiders, just as salt enhances and preserves food

⁷ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 145–148). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

CONCLUSION

I don't know where you stand as far as sharing your faith or evangelism. **BLANK SLIDE**

- Maybe you're really good at it – maybe it comes easy to you and you can do it well, striking the right balance of directness without offending
- Maybe you're not so good at it – not because you don't think it's important or don't want to tell others about Jesus
 - But you're worried that you'll offend someone
 - You're worried that you'll put someone off
- Maybe you're not confident in your ability to put your beliefs into words in a way that's clear
- Maybe you're worried that you'll share your faith with someone
 - You'll tell them that you're a Christian and you believe in Jesus
 - But then you'll make a mistake
 - You worry that you'll sin and they'll see sin in your life and think you're a hypocrite. A counterfeit
 - ... and that they'll lump you in with all the other hypocritical Christians they've met
- As I said earlier, I think that the fear of being labelled a hypocrite prevents more Christians from being confident in talking about their faith than anything else
 - Because we each know how sinful we really are
 - We know all of our behavior and thoughts and actions...
 - And we know some of them are sinful
- And the last thing we want is to be called a hypocrite or a counterfeit and so we keep our faith to ourselves
- But a pastor named Graham Marsh,⁸ said that what the world and Christians alike fail to understand is that hypocrisy is not falling short of a standard
 - Hypocrisy is not the inability to achieve perfection
 - A Christian who sins is not a hypocrite!
 - A Christian who sins is a normal human being. All people sin and fall short (Rom 3:23)

⁸ Graham Marsh, "Big Objections" <https://www.bethinking.org/is-religion-harmful/why-are-christians-so-hypocritical>. Much of the Conclusion section of this sermon and the 'cover band' illustration was derived from Marsh's teaching.

- Sinning doesn't make you a hypocrite!
 - It simply makes you imperfect
 - It simply makes you a human and a sinner. Just like everyone else
- Marsh points out that the opposite of hypocrisy then, is not perfection, but authenticity
- Authenticity is being real
- Authenticity is owning your mistakes and your imperfection
 - It's being real about where you're at and what God is doing in your life
 - But it's also being open to God's continual transformation in your life
 - Authenticity acknowledges the fact that we aren't perfect and never will be
- But there is one who was perfect
 - And He paid the ultimate price for our imperfection
- I think Christians fail to realize this
 - We fail to realize that we don't need to be perfect to share our faith confidently
 - We fail to realize that our imperfection may be the most authentic and powerful testimony about our Savior and His work in our lives
 - Because it's not about what we do or don't do, but rather what Jesus did
- So, we only need to be authentic, wise, and gracious
- This is why Paul says we should **pray with purpose**, **walk wisely**, and use **salty speech** towards outsiders
- These are the keys and steps to sharing our faith in confidence

ILLUSTRATION: Hotel California

One of my favorite bands is The Eagles.

For those of you under 30, The Eagles are a band that got their start in the mid-70s.

- They've got many popular classic rock songs
- They're sort of a mix of country and rock that appeals to lots of listeners
- They've sold more albums all time, than any other musician

One of their most popular songs is the song *Hotel California*.⁹

⁹ <https://www.songfacts.com/facts/eagles/hotel-california>

- The work and effort they put into writing this song alone is legendary
- It took the band more than a year to write the song *Hotel California*
 - They spent over a year writing the music and lyrics,
 - getting the vocals and instrument solos just right
- It took them 3 separate recording sessions before they got the version of the song they wanted
- In all, they spent 8 months of studio work recording and polishing the song, take after take after take
 - At times, they had cots in the studio and would go in and work on the song for 2 or 3 days at a time...
 - they were so dedicated to getting it right
- The song alone caused the album to be released 4 months later than planned
- But it all paid off... as the song is generally recognized – by fans and critics alike – as one of the great classic rock songs of all time

Now, Anne and I have gone on vacation to Mexico 3 different times in the 15 years that we've been married. We stayed at resorts each time.

- And while you're dining at these resorts, they'll have mariachi bands that come around to play music as entertainment
- They'll play some traditional Mexican songs, but they'll also play some songs catered to the American tourists who are there
- Every time, without fail, the mariachi band played *Hotel California*.
- And every time, without fail, it was a lousy version of *Hotel California*
 - The vocals weren't strong
 - The lyrics sounded strange when sung with a Spanish accent
 - There were no drums, no guitar solos
 - It just wasn't a strong version of the song
 - To a fan of The Eagles, it was downright terrible

Now suppose you never heard *Hotel California* before

- Suppose you don't know what I'm talking about when I say it's one of the great classic rock songs of all time
- And suppose you vacation in Mexico and the mariachi band comes around and you hear them play their version of *Hotel California*

- And so, your ears perk up
- You want to listen to the song that Eric spent the past 5 minutes of sermon time talking about
- And you listen more intently to the mariachi band
- And you hear them play their cover version of the song
- And as usual, they butcher it...
- And you say to yourself, *What was Eric talking about? That song is terrible! How in the world did The Eagles sell over 200 million albums playing garbage like that?*

I think this is how a lot of us think about sharing our faith.

We know that we're – at best – a lousy cover band, trying to play and sound like a classic song.

- And so, instead of going out there and playing *our* authentic version of the song – even if it's not perfect...
- We instead do nothing

But the problem with doing nothing... is that it does nothing!

- It does nothing to show Jesus to others
- It does nothing to reflect God's Kingdom to the world around us
- It does nothing to share the truth and good news of the gospel
- Doing nothing does nothing!

Now, that mariachi band isn't going to be selling many albums!

- But they aren't counterfeits either
- They aren't trying to be something that they're not
- They aren't trying to tell you they're The Eagles while playing a knock-off version of The Eagles
- They're simply pointing to the real thing
 - While you're travelling and away from home, they're reminding you of something good and familiar from home
 - They're playing you a reminder of the real song
 - In their own style
 - As best as they can
 - They're using their own skills and instruments

- To be a reflection and a reminder of the real thing

Isn't that what we're to be doing as Christians?

- Pointing outsiders to the real thing?
- Pointing others to Jesus?
- Using our own lives, and paths, and stories
- To be a reflection and reminder of Jesus

So that's the encouragement and challenge for us this morning as we start 2022:

- To put aside the fear of being seen as counterfeit
- And to be confident in our faith
 - To pray for God to open doors for us to share the gospel and share it clearly
 - To walk wisely before the world around us
 - To speak graciously and authentically, with words that are seasoned with salt

That's the call. That's the resolution. That's the encouragement this year: To point to Jesus and the gospel with confidence.

Let's pray.