

## Group Study Outline

### LAUNCHING QUESTION

What are some of the different ways (both good and bad) that Christians can sometimes think about how to relate to non-Christians?

Are you more tempted to be 'in-yer-face' or 'anonymous'?

READ Colossians 4:2-6

### QUESTIONS

Turn into pairs or threes. Re-read the passage again and try to come up with a neat summary of how Paul says we should relate to non-Christians.

Feedback to the rest of the group.

Before we've looked at it in detail together, which aspect of this passage most challenges you? Which aspect most encourages you?

How are we told to pray here? (2)

Why do we need to be told to be steadfast and watchful?

Why do we find praying difficult?

What advice would you give to someone who said that they found it really difficult to get around to praying?

What kinds of things do you find yourself praying for normally?

What does Paul ask the Colossians to pray for? (3)

Is anything surprising about his request? Considering his situation...?

Do you find that challenging?

How does Paul describe his ministry here? (3-4)

What should we pray for people regularly engaged in that kind of ministry?

Not everyone has the same kind of ministry as Paul. How should ordinary Christians behave around non-Christians? (5-6)

Why is our behaviour around outsiders important?

Can you think of any times when the way you've acted around unbelievers has opened a door for the gospel?

Why do we need to make the best use of the time? What's the rush?

What should our conversation be like?

Is evangelism just for evangelists?

How is 3-4 different to 6 in describing everyone's ministry and Paul's?

What's similar? What's different?

### SUMMARY and APPLICATION

On the scale of 'in-yer-face' to 'anonymous' we thought of at the start, how has this passage challenged you?

Who do you know who is an 'outsider' to Christian things?

How might you now make the most of the time with them?

Are there ways of using *A Passion For Life* to help with that?

How can we support one another and people like Paul in our various efforts?

*Give time to pray for one another as you engage with non-Christians. Pray for specific people you'd like to have opportunities to speak to. And pray for those in a 'Paul-esque' situation, e.g. our preachers and Mission Partners.*

# Colossians 4:2-6



## Colossians at a glance

The church in Colossae was planted by someone called Epaphras, a 'fellow servant... a faithful minister of Christ' (1:7). Paul was so pleased to hear how they were growing. But he also wanted to warn them.

There may be/would be false teachers ('FTers') who might 'delude' them with their clever arguments (2:4), pulling them away from Jesus. The FTers would make Christians feel they weren't enjoying *everything* God had to offer.

Paul wrote this letter to remind them that actually they do have ... everything! All the fullness of God dwells in Jesus, and Jesus fully fills every believer (2:9-10). It doesn't get fuller than that! When it comes to knowing God, being forgiven, growing in godliness, and arriving safely in glory, all we need is Jesus!

Paul's pastoral method is therefore to exalt Jesus: if we really grasp His supremacy and sufficiency (1:15-20), then that will help us to 'continue in the faith' (1:23), the hope of the gospel that God has made public and that Paul has been proclaiming so tirelessly (1:23; 2:3). That is exactly *why* Paul says all that he says about Jesus: 'in order that no-one may delude us'.

Because, of course, we still face the same potential delusions today. There are many sections of the Christian church that are similarly – and sadly – promoting a 'Jesus plus ...' gospel today. But if we attempt to add anything to all that Jesus already is, we will immediately diminish all that he really is.

## Theme Sentence for 4:2-6

Christians should be wise in dealing with non-Christians, praying for and taking opportunities to tell them the gospel.

## Context

This section continues the practical outworking of 3:1-4, which (in turn) is explaining what it means to 'continue to walk in Jesus' (2:6-7). Continuing in Jesus means setting my heart/mind on what will matter in heaven 'where Jesus is' since he is all that matters (11). Perhaps surprisingly, what results is not something 'other-worldly', like the FTers' 'hollow and deceptive' spirituality (2:8-23), with all their weird and wonderful visions, asceticism and angel-worship ... but something very everyday. With an eternal perspective, I'll live with Jesus as:

- Lord over my private life 3:5-11
- Lord over my life at church 3:12-17
- Lord over my life at home 3:18-21
- Lord over my life at work 3:22-4:1
- Lord over my life in the world 4:2-6

It's very striking that if you remove 'spirituality' from Jesus, then you remove it from the real world. If you stop setting your mind on things above, then you abandon ordinary human relationships on earth.

[NB]

for more resources visit [www.emmanuelonline.org.uk](http://www.emmanuelonline.org.uk)

## Commentary

Having dealt with relationships within the church (3:12-17), within marriage (3:18-19), between kids and parents (3:20-21), and at work (3:22-4:1), Paul turns his attention to the world. This section deals with how Christians should interact with non-Christians.

- 2 Since we are brand new people in Christ, with our identities utterly bound up with Him, of course we will want to pray. In prayer, we talk to God and can bring Him our thanks and praise, our confession of sin, as well as our cares, concerns and requests. Now that we are reconciled rather than hostile (1:21-22), we enjoy this close relationship with God through prayer.

However, despite the privilege that it is, Paul does envisage it being hard work sometimes! Hence the need to encourage believers to "continue steadfastly in prayer". We mustn't give up through discouragement, unbelief or busyness. We should devote ourselves to it, committing to it.

To be "watchful" in prayer shows that prayer isn't quite such a just-before-bed activity that we often think it is! We need to be alert! But this isn't just awake so our brains are in gear, it's being awake to the realities around us, the truth of the gospel, the fact that we don't have much time left... (5)

This watchfulness and commitment might sound like prayer is a very serious endeavour. It is! But it's to be filled with thanksgiving rather than mere duty. Given all that God has done for us, as 3:17 reminds us, we should give thanks to God the Father whatever we're doing.

- 3-4 What should we pray for? Having begun his letter telling the Colossians how much he prays for them, Paul now asks them to return the favour and pray for him.

These verses give us an insight into Paul's situation in writing to them. He's in prison because of his preaching. Talking about the Lord Jesus will land people in trouble and Paul is currently in the middle of that, sitting in a prison, most likely in Rome.

Paul asks for a door to be opened, but it's fascinating which door that is – not his prison door, but a door for the word! Whether Paul gets out of the clink is not important to him; he wants to gospel to get out.

The role Paul has is to "declare the mystery of Christ". This links to his description of his ministry in 1:24-2:3. The mystery is that Christ is among us Gentiles too. In Christ is every treasure of wisdom and understanding, so there's a need to urge every person to accept Him and stick with Him.

How Paul is to do that declaring is... "clearly". It's a wonderful mystery but it doesn't have to be over-complicated. Paul should speak in a clear way so that the truth is able to get to every person who needs to hear it. It's not enough to be accurate, the gospel also needs to be passed on with clarity.

It's very interesting to compare Paul's prayer requests with ours. He isn't after his own safety or comfort but the clear delivery of the gospel message. Do our prayer requests sound like that?

- 5 Not everyone is called to a ministry like Paul's, but all Christians are to think about how we interact with non-Christians. Paul calls them to consider their behaviour and their speech, their walk and their words.

Their walk is to be wise. This has to include godly behaviour consistent with having put on the new self (3:10). Christians are people who live in the real world seeing reality for what it truly is, with Jesus as Lord. So we should be living wisely as a result. In particular, thinking carefully about how we relate to unbelievers.

Note that they are referred to as "outsiders" here. There is a clear distinction between believers and unbelievers. They are not inside, reconciled, hidden with Christ, part of this community of grace and peace. They are still hostile, alienated, living in their 'old' selves, utterly outside God's gracious rescue. If this is true, we can't leave them there or act like things aren't urgent.

We are to "make the best use of the time". This phrase evokes the idea of time being in short supply; there's not much of it left so don't waste any! Jesus is going to appear any day now (3:4) and we want every person to be saved. So how we walk needs to be wise to the facts – there isn't a lot of time to play with, be intentional.

- 6 One aspect of our walk is our words. This is a key way of being wise towards outsiders and making the best use of the time. Our words are to "always be gracious". Not just being polite but being filled with grace. The gospel should be on the tip of our tongue, influencing all we say, even when we're not directly explaining it to someone.

No-one really knows what "seasoned with salt" means (other than when talking about chips!) but most suggest it means that it's interesting, it does good, it makes a difference. We want our words to be those things, filled with grace. It makes sense if Paul has already asked the Colossians to pray for a door to be opened for the word over in Rome, that when he addresses the Colossians' own words, he has gospel proclamation in mind as well. It would be odd to pray for evangelists abroad and not be concerned with our friends, family, neighbours and colleagues right here on our doorstep!

The context of this speech is to in response to non-Christians. Some, like Paul, should stand up and preach. Others should be ready to answer their friends. Both are vital ministries. Every outsider will have questions, either directly to us or quietly about life and God. It will take wisdom and relationship to know how to answer each one.

All of the above flows out of the central message of Colossians. Christ is all we need and we need to continue in Him. Our interactions with outsiders must come under His Lordship. In those relationships, we should be prayerful, wise and gracious, wanting the Word to be released so it has on others the effect it had on us (1:5-7). With *A Passion For Life* approaching, there's much to apply!