

**Sermon: Live the Missional Life**

**Passage: Colossians 4:2-6**

**Intro: New Year Resolutions**

[Slide #1]

This morning I will be speaking on “Living the Missional Life”, and we will look at the two essential missional habits that every Christian should develop based on Colossians 4:2-6.

Let me begin by asking you “How are your new year resolutions going?”

Going well or not so well?

I suspect for most of us (me included) our motivation to achieve our new year’s resolution is probably dwindling by now.

One of my resolutions was to go running to get fit and lose abit of weight that I gained over Christmas. But guess what?! Have not being out running once!

**Like new year resolutions, we may initially get motivated about God’s Mission but after a while as we get caught up in the busyness of life, we can lose that motivation.**

[Slide #2]

Creating good missional habits will help us to keep our vision and motivation for God’s mission alive as we navigate through the busyness of life.

But first of all, let me define what I mean by “missional”.

My working definition of “missional” means “Being shaped by the Mission of God, to carry out His Mission in the world.” (If you are on Twitter right now, Tweet it!!!)

Before Jesus ascended back to Heaven after his death and resurrection, He left his disciples with his final command in Matt 28.

And that was to “Go and make disciples of all nations....”

Our mission today is exactly the same as the mission back then. Jesus wants us to make disciples for him from all nations before He comes back again to judge the world, and bring about the new heavens and the new earth!

Being on God’s Mission is for every Christian, not just missionaries or pastors.

We are all called to make disciples of Jesus wherever we are.

Let us take a closer look at our passage in Colossians today, and find out what the two essential missional habits that we are to develop.

## **Missional Habit#1 – Gospel-shaped Praying**

The first missional habit that we should develop is “Gospel-shaped praying”. What do we mean by this?

Look with me at what Paul says in Colossians 4:2-4

*<sup>2</sup>Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. <sup>3</sup>And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. <sup>4</sup>Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.*

Basically, there are two aspects to what Paul says about Gospel-shaped praying.

1. **The Posture (v2)**
2. **The Content (v3-4)**

Let’s unpack these two aspects further.

### **Firstly, the posture of Gospel-shaped praying...**

Paul is not talking about a physical posture of praying but the posture of our hearts as we pray.

Paul mentions three things: (i) Be devoted, (ii) Be watchful and (iii) Be thankful.

What does it mean to be devoted, watchful and thankful?

JB Phillips translates verse 2 as “*Always maintain the habit of prayer: be both alert and thankful as you pray.*”

Prayer should be a habit we have in our lives. It should be part of our daily routines. Just as we sleep, wake up, eat, and go to school or work, prayer should be an integral part of our everyday life. We pray because it is an expression of our relationship with God.

But Paul doesn’t leave it there. He goes further to say that when we pray we need to have the posture of being watchful and thankful. He wants us to be actively watching how God is answering our prayers as we take part in His mission. And when we see God answer our prayers, Paul tells us to thank Him. Being watchful leads to thankfulness. We need to develop that cycle of watchfulness and thankfulness in our praying.

Look at the example of Paul himself. Paul was a man of prayer. You just need to read all his letters and come to the same conclusion. At the beginning of each letter, he would always say to his recipients **how much he is praying for them**, and **how he is thanking God for them** because of **what he has heard about them**.

Take the example of Colossians. In 1:3 Paul writes “We **always** thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.” And then in 1:9 “...since the day we heard about you, we **have not stopped praying** for you.” Notice Paul’s devotion to prayer here. He is always praying for them. He has made it a habit to pray for them.

And notice Paul’s watchfulness in prayer for the Colossians in Verse 4 which says “because **we have heard** of your faith in Christ Jesus....” He has also heard about their love for all God’s people and how the gospel is bearing fruit in their lives (vv5-6). He knows what’s going on in the lives of those he is praying for.

What is remarkable about Paul is that he hasn’t even met these Colossians before. Paul wasn’t the one who planted the church there. It was planted by one of Paul’s fellow-workers, Epaphras, who brought the gospel to Colossae (v7).

Epaphras, himself was also a man of prayer. Listen to what Paul says of him in 4:12, “Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. **He is always wrestling in prayer for you...**”

It’s pretty interesting isn’t it that Paul uses the imagery of wrestling to describe the activity of prayer. Have you ever watched a wrestling match on TV? Not the fake WWF wrestling but the Olympic wrestling! Pretty physical hey?! You need a lot of strength, determination, perseverance and hard work.

Doesn’t this also remind you of the famous wrestling match in Genesis between Jacob and God? Jacob wrestled with God all through the night, and would not let him go until God had blessed him.

Do we have that same tenacity in wrestling in prayer for others? I would love for you to be wrestling in prayer for the people in our ministry in Malawi. It is not by our works alone that people’s lives are transformed, it is through your prayers! Because when we pray, we are saying “God, only you can change people’s lives. Please do it.”

If we are to be effective for God in His mission in the world, we are to develop that posture of praying, and being watchful and thankful in it.

**Now, let’s look at the second part of Gospel-shaped praying – the content.**

Here, Paul is talking about what we should be focusing on as we pray.

Look with me at what Paul ask the Colossians to pray for in verses 3-4.

*“And pray for us, too, that God may **open a door** for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ (the Gospel), for which I am in chains. Pray that I may **proclaim it clearly** as I should.”*

Paul is asking the Colossians to pray for open doors for the Gospel and for clear proclamation of the Gospel.

But what is remarkable here is that Paul is writing from prison. Paul is chained up. Locked behind closed doors, but he asks the Colossians to pray for an open door for the gospel so that he can proclaim it clearly!

Can you appreciate Paul’s dilemma here? He was commissioned by God “to be the light for the Gentiles and to bring Salvation to the ends of the earth (Acts 13:47).”

*(For those of you who want to go deeper, compare Acts 13:47 with our OT reading, Isaiah 49:6. Is Paul referring himself to be the Servant here?)*

The weight of his responsibility was to take the gospel to the whole of the non-Jewish world.

But He is chained up! He doesn’t know when he will be released. The clock is ticking. He doesn’t have a mobile phone or free wifi in prison to connect with the outside world. Just paper and ink! Even if he was released, he doesn’t have a car or plane to help him catch up lost time.

But also appreciate the faith that Paul has in God. He is asking God to do the impossible! Paul is confident that God is the one who will do it. Paul has seen and experienced God at work through the Gospel bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world as he says in 1:6.

In the same way, we are to pray as Paul does. Gospel-shaped praying requires us to pray for the seemingly impossible task of taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth. But we know it is possible because God can do the impossible!

There are still many places in the world today where Jesus is not yet known. In the Lakeshores of Malawi, many people are still bound to Islam or Traditional religion. Many Chinese and Indians in the business sector of Malawi are yet to know Jesus.

Let us be praying for open doors and clear proclamation of the Gospel in those places, and around the world.

Do you know what happens when God’s people devote themselves to pray missionally? Revival and mission happens!

## **Zinzendorf and the Moravians**

In 18<sup>th</sup> Century Germany, Count Zinzendorf and the Moravians had a profound passion for prayer and mission. Count Zinzendorf was a rich young ruler, but unlike the rich young ruler that Jesus encountered, Zinzendorf had a great love for Jesus. His life motto was “I have one passion; it is Jesus, Jesus only.” And out of this passion came a life disciplined in prayer.

When the Moravians, a group of refugees fleeing Catholic persecution come upon Zinzendorf’s estate, he gladly welcomed them and eventually they became a church. Zinzendorf’s passion for prayer rubbed off on the Moravians.

In 1727, a great revival broke out among this small community of believers when they gathered for a prayer meeting that would last for 100 years!

24 men, and 24 women made a covenant with themselves and God to take turns praying every hour.

Within that 100 years of praying, the small Moravian community had sent out 300 missionaries to the ends of the earth! Some of them had even sold themselves into slavery so that they may reach the slaves in the West Indies for Christ.

When God’s people devote themselves to prayer, revival and mission happens!

Prayer is the fuel for missions. Let’s make it a priority to develop this habit of praying missionally... to pray for open doors and clear proclamation of the Gospel.

## **Missional Habit #2 – Gospel-shaping Living**

Let’s move onto the second missional habit.

The second habit that every Christian should develop is “Gospel-shaped living.”

What does this mean?

Look at what Paul says in Colossians 4:5-6

*<sup>5</sup>Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. <sup>6</sup>Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

I think Paul is saying here that just as we to pray for the advancement and the proclamation of the gospel, we are also to live out the gospel in our daily lives to make the gospel attractive through our behaviour and speech.

We are to live such **questionable lives** that make unbelievers hunger and thirst for the gospel. They will want what we have because they see the gospel works... that the gospel really changes lives!

So Paul says in verse 5 “to be wise” in how we behave around unbelievers. People are watching us constantly to see if we live out what we believe.

We don’t want to be hypocrites. We don’t want to be a bad smell. We don’t want to be an unnecessary barrier for others to come to know Jesus because of our bad behaviour.

But more than that, we are to make opportunities for the gospel.

**Let us move on to the other aspect of Gospel-shaped living and that is, our speech.**

Paul says in verse 6 *“let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”*

In the same way that our behaviour can attract people to the gospel, so can our speech. When our speech is gracious (not malicious or aggressive), people are more likely to listen to what we have to say.

When our speech is salty (full of flavour, interesting, and life preserving), people will thirst for more of the gospel. When this happens, we need to be prepared to know how to answer everyone for why we believe the gospel... why we personally believe in Jesus.

Peter says the same thing in 1 Peter 3:15-16 *“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”*

Would you be ready if someone today asked you “Why are you a Christian?” What would you say?

Most of us know what Paul says very well. We know the manner that we are to conduct ourselves in behaviour and speech, but I suspect what we might be weak at is the building of relationships with unbelievers.

Make opportunities to genuinely to get to know your non-Christian friends or make non-Christian friends; and get into salty conversations with them. Do life with them so that they get to know you and your faith.

Let’s make it a habit to live missionally, to intentionally to get to know our non-Christian friends, and to make every opportunity for them to know the gospel through your words and actions.

### **The Japanese Footballer**

During our last term, we became good friends with a Japanese football player in Malawi. His name is Genki Nakamura. The interesting thing about Genki and me is that we look alike!

On several occasions before we met him, Malawians on the street would call out to me “Nakamura, Nakamura”. I became so intrigued that I looked him up online and discovered that he was playing for one of the clubs in Malawi, and we actually looked alike!

I jokingly said to Jo that before the end of our term here, I would like to meet him and have a photo with him. And so what does Jo do, she contacts Genki on Facebook and surprises me by arranging a meeting!

The rest was history. We would invite him to go with us on family trips, and he invited us to his football games.

He also introduced us to his other Japanese friends who were volunteering in Malawi. There are about 100 Japanese volunteers in Malawi working on projects. We would throw Japanese curry parties at our place for some of them!

Who would have known that we would have such an opportunity for the gospel. For most of the Japanese friends we met, we were the first Christian family that they have ever met. In Japan, only about 1% of the population are Christians.

We praise God for the opportunity that we had to also introduce Genki to our Japanese colleague who is a SIM missionary lecturing at a Bible college, and he was able to share the gospel with him in Japanese.

This experience was not something that we had anticipated. But God gives us opportunities for the Gospel, and he wants us to make the most of them!

## **Conclusion**

This morning we have looked at the two essential missional habits that as Christians we should be developing.

### **#1 Gospel-shaped Praying**

We looked at how we need to be devoted to prayer, having a posture of watchfulness and thankfulness.

We looked at the content of Gospel-shaped praying, which is to pray for open doors and clear proclamation of the gospel.

### **#2 Gospel-shaped Living**

We looked at how we need to be wise in how we act towards outsiders, making every opportunity for the gospel.

We looked at having graceful and salty speech, and being prepared to give people a reason for the hope that we have.

The question for you to think about is how can you build these two missional habits into your daily routine, or weekly routine, or monthly routine?

What are some practical things you can start doing as you leave today?

Maybe...

Start up a prayer group to specifically pray for world missions once a month?

Maybe...

Include into your family devotion time or at the dinner table to pray for world mission or your non-christian family and friends.

Maybe...

Make it a habit to pray to God before you go to work each day to ask him to put into your path someone to share Christ's love with?

Maybe...

Join a sporting team or club in your neighbourhood or workplace and make friends with unbelievers?

Maybe...

Buy your work colleague a coffee or suggest to go out for lunch together to get to know them better?

**If we are to be effective in carrying out God's mission, we need to be building intentionally into our daily routine, the missional rhythms of prayer and gospel-living.**

We do not accomplish God's Mission by having 'New Year' type resolutions. We need to create missional habits.

These habits do not come natural for me. I'm a fellow traveller with you. I'm still growing and developing these habits!

But will you join me in being intentional about developing these missional habits so that we can be effective together in God's Mission?

Pray