

Good morning everyone and welcome to Fellowship Dallas. We're glad you are here. My name is Randy and I'm one of the Associate Pastors here at the church. If you are new here, then you may not know that next Sunday is a big day for us. We, along with hundreds of other churches across the Metroplex, are launching into a two-month series called *Explore God*. We are really excited about what we sense God will do in our church and through our church to reach the people of our city, our neighborhoods, our families and our friends. We can't wait to hear the stories of conversations and how God uses our offerings of time and love to bless others.

Last week, we exceeded one of the goals we set for ourselves as a church. We had hoped to have at least 250 people attend an Explore God orientation, and after the final orientation last Sunday, we added the numbers up and we saw 268 people attend, so that's definitely a reason for celebration. Thank you to everyone who took time out to understand a little more about Explore God. We will get into a little more detail about what's in store for our church later in the service.

Last week Kurt spoke about how we can prepare for Explore God and today I want to add to his encouragement to each of us to live for Jesus as a means to open opportunities to talk about Jesus. In our culture, talking about faith and spirituality has been somewhat off-limits. If you want to talk about sports, the weather, breaking news or what you saw at the movies, that's fair game. But, traditionally, the two things you don't bring up in social situations are what: politics and religion.

But as difficult as these conversations can be to initiate, spirituality is something that everyone deals with and may not be as off-limits as we think. Right now, there are two people that are very important to me who are going through a very difficult time. They're both in their thirties. One is male, the other female. One is a Christian, the other is not. They're having such a difficult time because both of them are at a place in life where they simply don't know what to do. They don't know what their next step should be as it pertains to a career, as it pertains to family, as it pertains to anything. They get a sense that there is something bigger out there, but they are frustrated because they don't even know how to step towards that larger meaning.

In fact, one of them out of the blue texted me just a few days ago about it. We were in the middle of a conversation about Tom Brady and he stopped in the middle and texted this: "I'm lost and have no clue what my purpose is . . . I'm actually tired of trying to figure out what to do."

The fact that two people so close to me are having such a similar struggle leads me to believe that this tension is actually quite prevalent in our society. I don't think their story is too different than perhaps a lot of people here. Because of many reasons, we tend to wrap up our meaning in a career, but I think our search for meaning is actually far greater than a paycheck and how we earn that paycheck. Our search for meaning must extend beyond the hours in which we clock in and clock out. Our purpose in life must be just as valid at 9 pm

as it is as 9 am. I believe that someone can have a really horrible job or a really horrible work situation and still find life very meaningful. How do we add to the meaning in our life?

For Christians, our purpose must include the mission that Jesus handed down to His followers at the end of the gospel of Matthew. Jesus articulated that mission in Matthew 28:19 when he said, "Go and make disciples." The highest and most meaningful calling for any Christian is to help another person come to know their Creator and receive eternal life, leading the person in their relationship with Jesus.

In another passage in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus said the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love others. And the greatest expression of our love is sharing with others the good news of God's own love and grace. But most Christians find it difficult to talk about God with their coworkers and neighbors who are not Christians. Watch this video clip with me and you'll see what I mean.

### [Video 1]

What did you hear Gabe Lyons say? Why is it hard to talk about God? The main reason it's hard to talk about God to others is that we don't have a real relationship with people who are far from God. We sometimes try to talk to them, but:

- we don't know where they're coming from.
- we don't really know what their questions are, so we're trying to answer questions that they aren't asking.
- we don't have a humble, genuine willingness to learn about them and listen to them, to draw out their story, their thoughts, their longings, their dreams.
- we don't trust that God's love is pursuing them and that He's the one who will win them over— not us!
- sometimes we just put too much pressure on ourselves and then we don't love people well.

How do we approach the whole idea of having spiritual conversations with non-believers? What are we supposed to do? Paul provides some answers for us in his letter to the Colossians, towards the back of your Bible. If you have your Bible, turn with me to the fourth chapter of Colossians. When we read this passage, we'll see that we can't speak *for* God if we're not speaking *with* God. We can't expect to declare the Good News about Jesus if we don't have a relationship with Him. **To speak *for* God, speak *with* God.**

Paul's letter to the Colossian church is such an encouraging book of the Bible. He begins in the first chapter thanking God for their church and then launches into a beautiful description of Christ and why Jesus is above all things. After going on to speak a little about his ministry, Paul writes to the church how to live according to their faith in this Jesus for whom everything was made. And before Paul gets to his conclusion and final greetings, we see a few short verses at the beginning of chapter four giving final instructions for how the church should live in relation to those outside the church.

Let's read Colossians 4, beginning with verse 2, and see how we can live into our purpose and find more meaning in our everyday relationships with people who do not yet trust in Jesus. Paul writes, "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. 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— that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

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."

This passage offers two encouragements for Christians as we relate to outsiders. When we incorporate these encouragements into our lives, we discover more meaning and we will help others discover more meaning in their lives as well.

The first encouragement by Paul to discover meaning in your life is to speak with God. **To discover meaning in their lives, Christians must speak with God.** As most of you know, the Bible calls this ongoing conversation with God "prayer."

I know this seems simple, but prayer is absolutely essential not just for the Explore God series, but for every aspect of the Christian walk. Prayer is crucial. Absolutely critical. If you didn't realize it already, our church firmly believes that prayer is quite powerful. Not only does it open our eyes to who God is, it reminds us of what He and only He can do.

Many of you use the prayer guide that we print out each week in the Worship Guide. This week, we changed it up a little. Instead of having a daily verse with a couple of sentences, we have taken the first names of the people our church listed last week on prayer cards to invite you to pray for each individual by name. Each of the names on this page represents a person, a human being who does not know God. An individual that someone in your church has said – we need to stop and pray for this person. So this week, would you please take this guide with you and pray for these people by name? If you have enough time, pray for all of them every day. Or you could just take a group of names each day and go through the list. Or you could pray for five each day throughout the Explore God series. But let's pray for these people by name. If you do nothing else during the next seven weeks of Explore God, please pray.

Notice how Paul talks about our prayer. We must *continue* in it, *be watchful in it, with thanksgiving*. I have three synonyms that might make it easier to remember how Paul talks about prayer. According to Colossians 4:2, **prayer is to be constant, careful and content**. Gary would be proud of me, since I have three words that start with the same letter. Our prayer is to be Constant, Careful and Content.

Our prayer is to be **Constant**. We need to be persistent in our prayers. Somehow, culturally, throwing up a prayer became associated with a small, one-time act of desperation. Prayer is not the last resort. Prayer is not a panic button. Prayer is plan A. It is the lifeline. Prayer,

along with the Bible, is the way that God reaches into our lives and guides us through His Spirit. And when it comes to relating to people who do not know God, prayer must go before us, after us and at all points in between. Sometimes we pray and don't see something right away, but remember that God's ways are often mysterious and sometimes not easily detected. Just because you can't see God working doesn't mean He's on vacation. Don't give up on your prayers. Don't give up. Stay constant in your prayer.

Our prayer must also be **Careful**. We must also be careful in our prayers. Paul uses the word "watchful" and some other translations use the word "alert". When we pray, we must be careful not to get sidetracked or distracted. We must stay focused and go before God confidently alert. We must be careful. In other words, when you pray for someone, pray for them. Don't check your Instagram feed and pray for them. Don't watch TV and pray for them. Focus. Put your heart into it. Be alert. Take Care. Be careful in your prayer.

Thirdly, our prayer must be **Content**. Our prayer must be content. We must consistently be thankful in our prayers, knowing that God is good and His timing is perfect. We must be content, even when things don't turn out as we expect them to. Sometimes God's answering our prayers better than we had ever anticipated. Don't be demanding. Don't be arrogant. Be humble, grateful that the God of all creation has made room for you in His kingdom – in His family. Approach Him as a good, perfect Father. Your prayer must be content.

Our prayer must be constant, careful and content.

Now I want you to notice something very interesting in verses three and four. Let's read them again: "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— that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak."

Notice how Paul guides their prayers. Remember where Paul is. As he writes this letter, he is in prison. Did he ask that the Christians pray for his release? No. Did he ask for God to break him out Shawshank-style? No. Could God do that? Yes. Paul's concern was less for his circumstances and more for a higher purpose, specifically that he would be clear in his message to the other people in prison. In fact, he demonstrates that the *very reason* he is in prison is to open a door for the truth of Christ to the people in that place.

What an amazing perspective. Sometimes we get caught up in our negative circumstances not realizing that sometimes God has us down in the valley so we can be a light to the other people in the same valley as us. Think about it – if you know someone who is having a rough time finding a job, are they more likely to relate to someone who has had a stable career for 20 years or someone else who just got laid off, too?

When it comes to non-believers, let's not focus on the circumstances, let's focus on the clarity of our message so that we might be door-openers, not door-shutters. I'm not saying it's wrong to pray for a new job if you don't have one. What I am saying is that when it comes to our constant, careful and content praying for others, we must do our best to focus

on what's up to us. Often in life, we can't do too much to change circumstances. We CAN change how we respond to those circumstances. Pray for open doors and a clear message. As Coach Taylor would say, "Clear Eyes, Full Hearts, Can't Lose." (Texas Forever)

So the first encouragement to add meaning to your life and to the lives of others is to speak with God. Everything begins with prayer. We must speak with God.

The second encouragement that can add meaning to our lives pertains to how we interact with outsiders. **To discover meaning in their lives, Christians must speak for God.** Christians must speak for God. Now don't get me confused. When I say, "speak for God" I'm not suggesting that you put yourself in His place and speak as if you were God. What I am saying is that as believers we must speak positively about God in order to fulfill His purpose for our lives. We ought to bless others by speaking for God and His purposes.

The encouragement by Paul to speak for God comes down to two practices. It all comes down to two things: our *walk* and our *talk*. Speaking for God comes down to our walk and our talk. Let's read verse five again: "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time."

When Paul uses the term "outsiders" he is referencing people who aren't Christians. His encouragement is for us to live wisely towards them. In the days of the early church, believers were often slandered by those outsiders. For example, Christians in the early church were called "atheists" because they only believed in one God and you couldn't see Him. Because Christians served no visible gods they were considered atheists. Also, outsiders considered Christians "unpatriotic" because they did not burn incense before the image of the emperor, and "immoral" because, out of necessity, they would often meet behind locked doors. Paul knew that the best way to defeat this slander was for Christians to conduct themselves not only virtuously instead of wickedly but also wisely instead of foolishly. Their walk was important.

The word for "time" in verse five is the Greek word *kairos* [καιρος], which more fully means "opportune time". Some of your translations might say, "making the best use of every opportunity." Paul is saying that we ought to always be on the lookout for opportunities to demonstrate God to the world. This doesn't always have to be in word, but it often words can be the very thing that outsider needs to see God's love. Are you kind with the people you meet? Are you trustworthy? Do you act wisely? People tend to gravitate towards others who make consistently make wise decisions. Trust and credibility take time to develop. Walk in wisdom.

To speak for God we must walk the walk, but we also must talk the talk. Let's read verse six again. "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." Paul wants to make sure the Colossian church doesn't just walk the walk, but that they talk the talk.

“Gracious speech” was actually a term that non-Christians used to describe “sparkling conversation, speech dotted with witty or clever remarks.” The best way to increase your effectiveness at sharing the gospel is to develop your ability to have simply good conversations. Learn how to have pleasant, enjoyable discussions; learn and practice the art of conversation. Being able to have a meaningful conversation is prerequisite to having a spiritual conversation!

Paul also writes that conversation be seasoned with salt. Salt had two purposes. The first was to add flavor. The best conversationalists are able to sprinkle in appropriate humor and wit, or share information of interest to others. Asking good questions is also a way to add “flavor.” The second purpose of salt was to preserve. By keeping conversation going on a positive, wholesome level, we preserve the goodness and richness of the discussion.

Sometimes you get caught in a conversation with someone who isn’t so interesting. Maybe you’re at a party and your eyes are all over the room, begging someone to come save you. But I love it when I get into a conversation with someone who is a great conversationalist. They don’t dominate the conversation. They ask good questions and give good answers.

I believe that good conversations will inevitably lead to the opportunity to discuss matters that are more personal and spiritual in nature. If we facilitate good conversations, we will be confronted with questions about the real struggles and challenges of life. In these times, you will know how to answer with gentleness, humility, and truth.

So we must speak for God. We speak for God in our walk and in our talk. But we can’t do this on our own. Remember: we have a lifeline called *prayer*. To speak for God, we must speak with God. ***To speak for God, we must speak with God.*** When we speak with God, when we speak for God, meaning, fulfillment, purpose begins to bubble up within us. We, people created in the image of God, begin find meaning in every day conversations, in every day interactions with others and on our own. Some people might not believe that there is a purpose to life, but as Christians, we must disagree. We must disagree. Watch this video.

## [video 2]

Next week, we will begin Explore God and starting right now, you are on mission. There are thousands of people who right now – right this very second – don’t know if there’s any purpose to their lives. Maybe this describes one of you. Our invitation to all of these people is to Explore God. Meaning in life can only be found in Him.

Some of you have agreed to take up the task of facilitating discussion groups in your neighborhoods or in your office or even right here at church. You must pray. If you’re interested in facilitating an Explore God group, there’s still time for us to get you set up. Find a pastor or someone in an Explore God shirt and ask us how we can hook you up as a facilitator.

Others of you aren't able to facilitate, but you're interested in joining an Explore God group. In addition to some small groups doing Explore God, our church will host three Explore God groups beginning next Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings. The Tuesday group will be hosted by The Awakening, our ministry to young adults. They are moving from Sunday mornings to Tuesday Nights beginning Tuesday, September 15 and they will be focusing on Explore God. The Wednesday and Thursday groups are options for people of all ages. All of these groups launch not this week, but next week. We'll have more details about how to find these groups next Sunday, as we launch Explore God.

But to conclude the service, I would like us to take some time to pray and to take communion. I'd like each of us to take a few minutes and go to God on behalf of this church and the hundreds of other churches who will open their doors next Sunday to people interested in what we have to say about God. Pray for these churches, pray for our Explore God groups and the facilitators who have stepped up to answer God's call. And, finally, pray for the people who do not yet know Jesus, that our walk and our talk would lead them to faith in Jesus and to eternal life with Him.

We have communion tables spread throughout the worship center. After you are done praying, when you are ready, you may get up, go to one of these tables, pick up the elements, take the bread and the cup, and leave the worship center.

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul writes, "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Let us pray.