

INTRODUCTION

Today's message is entitled, "Inside Out & Outside In." What do you think when you hear those words? Most of us who've ever done laundry know what it is to take an inside-out shirt out of the dryer. (or you could say it was outside in) So, we have to turn it right-side out. (or you could say, right side in as well)

Or the word "inside" may make you think about someone who's "an insider," because they have information most other people don't have. That's why there's a show called "Inside Edition," which gives updates on all the latest celebrity gossip. In the financial world there's a term known as "insider trading." Insider trading is actually the legal trade of stock by officers of a corporation, but there is also illegal "insider trading" as Martha Stewart can testify.

People housed in some kind of facility often talk about themselves on the "inside" and others on the "outside." I recall hearing a funny story once about a salesman who had a flat tire beside an insane asylum. As he starting replacing the flat tire, one of the inmates from the asylum wandered over to the fence to watch. The salesman removed the lug nuts from the flat tire and placed them in the hub cap. However, when he was removing the flat tire, he accidentally kicked the hub cap and watched in horror as all of the lug nuts rolled down into a storm drain. The salesman was irate. He kicked his car and said, "Now, what am I going to do?" The inmate from the asylum spoke up and said, "Why don't you take one lug nut from the other three tires to put your spare on—you can drive that way until you reach a place where you can replace the lug nuts you lost. So the salesman followed his advice. Afterwards, the salesman looked at the inmate and said, "That was a pretty smart idea, what are doing in an insane asylum?" The inmate smiled and said, "I may be crazy...but I'm not stupid."

The Bible talks about insiders and outsiders, too. In this passage from God's Word we discover some practical truth about how those of us on the inside should relate to what the Bible calls "outsiders."

Colossians 4:2-6. "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. 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. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."

According the Bible there are only two kinds of people: Those who are inside the Kingdom of God and those who are still outside God's Kingdom. Jesus talked about outsiders when He said to His disciples, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables." (Mark 4:11)

To put it simply, "insiders" could be called "Believers." Those of us who have trusted Christ for our salvation are insiders; this isn't a term of superiority, we're literally inside God's family. But who are the "outsiders?" I used to call them "unbelievers" OR "non-Christians" but over the past few years I've started calling those on the outside "pre-Believers." They are pre-believers

because the Bible teaches that one day *every* knee will bow and *every* tongue will confess Jesus is Lord. Everyone will believe in Jesus ultimately. For some on the outside it may not happen until after they die and stand before God in Judgement—but they WILL believe. It’s just a matter of when.

God wants them to believe while they’re still alive. Here’s God’s plan: To get insiders out to get outsiders in. Those aren’t two separate thoughts—it is a cohesive plan. God wants those of us on the inside (Believers) to get *out* in order to get outsiders (Pre-Believers) *in*. God wants everyone on the outside to come into His kingdom. He wants every lost child to come into His family. He wants every lost lamb to come into His flock. There are some who teach God only wants a limited number of people to be saved, but my Bible says, “God is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9). If you’re outside of God’s family, He wants you to be on the inside.

How many of you have a family member or friend you suspect is outside God’s Family? Do you have a neighbor, work associate, or fellow student who needs to know the Lord? As I share this message I want you to be thinking of these family members, friends, and associates. So how do we go about getting insiders out to get outsiders in? Two strategic steps are found in our text. First, we pray for them, and then we engage them in conversation.

1. BE WATCHFUL AS YOU PRAY FOR OUTSIDERS

In verses 2-3 we read, “Pray diligently. Stay alert, with your eyes wide open in gratitude. Don’t forget to pray for us that God will open doors for telling the mystery of Christ. Pray that every time I open my mouth I’ll be able to make Christ plain as day to them.” (*The Message*)

Prayer is not just a quiet conversation with God; it is a secret weapon for the salvation of the lost. John Piper wrote: “Prayer is not designed as an intercom between us and God to serve the domestic comforts of the saints. It’s designed as a walkie-talkie for spiritual battlefields. It’s the link between active soldiers and their command headquarters, with its unlimited fire-power and air cover and strategic wisdom. When you understand this, you can pray the locks off people’s hearts.”

The phrase “watch and pray” was first used in the book of Nehemiah. The Israelites were trying to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem, but enemies were intent on making them fail. Nehemiah said, “But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.” (Nehemiah 4:9) I don’t know where we ever got the custom of closing our eyes to pray—but the Bible never teaches that. Spiritually speaking, we must be praying with our eyes wide open. As we pray, we must be watching to see what God is doing, but also watching for what our enemy is doing. Jesus told His disciples to “watch and pray” in the Garden of Gethsemane. As it relates to His second coming He has instructed us to “watch and pray, because nobody knows the hour.”

If you have someone you’re praying for to become a Christian, how do you pray for that person? Do you just ask God to save them? That’s a good start, but there are some specific ways you can pray for your friends, relatives, neighbors and work associates who are outsiders.

(1) Ask God to remove obstacles blocking their way to God

A person who has not yet believed in Jesus Christ is at a disadvantage. God wants them to be saved, but there is a spiritual adversary who is trying to throw obstacles in their pathway to God. The Bible says, "The god of this age (that's Satan) has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel." (2 Corinthians 4:4) Satan has blindfolded your friends and loved ones who don't know the Lord. Our job is to pray away that spiritual blindness and show them the light of Jesus.

These obstacles blocking their way to God may be things like a rebellious spirit, or some specific sin gripping their soul. For others, it may be intellectual pride, or a bitter attitude they've been carrying since they were young. They may be running with the wrong crowd. You don't even have to KNOW what the obstacles are to pray for them to be removed.

These spiritual obstacles can fall when we pray boldly, persistently and by faith. The first way to start praying for your loved one is to simply say, "Lord, I am claiming John or Mary for you. I ask you to tear down the walls Satan has erected. I ask you to heal them of the spiritual blindness that has affected them, and open their eyes to your love and goodness."

(2) Ask God to open a door for someone to share Christ with them

When Paul wrote this letter he was locked in prison. He asked the church to pray for him. But he didn't ask them to pray the prison doors would be opened. He said, "And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message." God loves to open doors. You might not feel qualified to share your faith with someone in your family or a close friend. Sometimes those are the most difficult people to win to Christ. But you can pray that God will create a series of Divine Rendezvous so your loved one is exposed to the good news.

While you're praying for open doors, ask God to open the door to that person's heart as well. Jesus said in Revelation 3:20 "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." Jesus is too much of a gentleman to ever force His way into someone's life. He will lovingly and patiently stand at the door of a person's heart and keep knocking. Every time your loved one is exposed to the gospel it's another knock on the door of their heart.

I've found through the years most people come to Christ because of multiple moments in which they are exposed to God's love. Let's imagine an outsider we'll call Sam for whom you're asking God to open doors into his heart. One evening Sam is channel surfing and he stumbles on our broadcast or some other Christian television show. God is cracking the door open. He passes a billboard with a Christian message; God opens it a little wider. Someone at work talks about something neat that happened at their church. The door cracks open wider. Sam is surfing the internet and finds a website that shares the gospel. The circle is usually completed when someone who cares for him enough to invite him to church and he experiences the presence of the Lord in our worship. In church, Sam hears the gospel shared in a positive way. He may not trust Christ, that first Sunday, but the knocking gets louder and louder until Sam finally opens the door of his heart and Jesus comes in. At that point an outsider becomes an insider and there is

joy in the presence of angels over one Sam who repents!

Prayer is the BEST thing you can do for your loved ones who are outsiders. Dr. S. D. Gordon wrote: "The greatest thing anyone can do for God and man is pray. It is not the only thing, but it is the chief thing. The great people of earth are the people who pray. I do not mean those who talk about prayer; nor those who say they believe in prayer; nor yet those who can explain about prayer; but I mean those people who take time to pray." (*Quiet Talks on Prayer*).

George Mueller was a great pastor in Bristol, England. He had a friend who was not a Christian. Mueller prayed for him to be saved for 40 years, and the friend never accepted Christ. George Mueller died and at his funeral, his friend finally gave his heart to Christ. So don't stop praying for your loved ones to find God's love and forgiveness. Why don't you take an index card and just write the names of four or five people you know who need the love and forgiveness of Jesus? Make it your "Most Wanted for Jesus" list. Then simply start praying for them. You will be amazed to see what will happen. In addition to praying for outsiders, the Bible says we must also

2. BE WISE AS YOU ENGAGE OUTSIDERS

The Message paraphrases verse 5-6 this way: "Use your heads as you live and work among outsiders. Make the most of every opportunity. Be gracious in your speech. The goal is to bring out the best in others in a conversation, not put them down, or cut them out." We must be wise in the way we engage outsiders. Jesus said we must be "as wise as serpents, but as harmless as doves." (Matthew 10:16) This means we must employ tact and kindness in sharing Christ with outsiders. Too many people have been turned off by some loudmouthed Christian beating them over the head with a big Bible. Unbelieving husbands have been turned off by wives who nag them about their faith. Some Christians are so obnoxious that when a pre-believer watches and listens to them they think, "If that's what being a Christian is, I don't want any of that!" Gandhi said, "I do not reject your Christ. I love your Christ. It's just that so many of you Christians are so unlike your Christ." In this passage, God gives us two important principles to remember as we go out to engage outsiders.

(1) Seize every chance to demonstrate the difference

The Bible says, "Make the most of every opportunity!" The Latin term *carpe diem* doesn't mean "fish of the day." It means, "Seize the day!" A few years ago, there was a movie called "Dead Poets Society" in which Robin Williams played a private school teacher named Mr. Keating. On the first day of every class, he took his students into the hall and showed them the photographs of former students who were dead and buried. He said: "We are food for worms, lads! Believe it or not each and every one of us in this room one day will stop breathing, turn cold, and die. Step forward and see these faces from the past. They were just like you are now. They believed they were destined for great things. Their eyes are full of hope. But, you see, gentlemen, these boys are fertilizing daffodils. If you listen real close, you will hear them whisper their legacy to you. Lean in. What do you hear?... 'Carpe diem!' Seize the day boys! Make your lives extraordinary!"

As Christians, we don't have to make our lives extraordinary, we are extraordinary. Jesus Christ

lives in us, and that makes us different. We are naturally supernatural and supernaturally natural. Every day, we have opportunities to show people how we are different. We turn the other cheek. We go the second mile. We pray for our enemies. We don't have to act different, we *are* different.

I've never known of a person who was argued into the Kingdom, but there are multitudes that come to Christ because we have pointed them to Christ by the difference in our lives. Verse 6 says we need to have an answer to everyone who asks us. That doesn't mean we have to know a theological answer, it means when you live differently, people will ask you and the answer is simple: JESUS.

When I was in seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, I worked at Bowman Field airport as a lineman. My job was to park the airplanes, refuel them, put them in the hangars, and whatever else I was asked to do. I'm a Colossians 3:23 guy, so I did my job cheerfully, diligently, and with enthusiastic excellence. I'd been working there for a couple of months, and I was helping an old mechanic take the cowling off an engine to change the oil. I grabbed one side and he grabbed the other. Before we lifted it off, he said, "I just gotta' know one thing about you." I said, "What is it?" He said, "Why are you always so happy?" We lifted the cowling off and while I helped him change the oil, I shared with him the difference Jesus made in my life. Before we finished the job, I prayed for him and later gave him a Bible to read.

We need to seize every opportunity to share Christ. I was driving down I-20 the other day looking at all the billboards put up by the casinos in Shreveport, and I thought, "We're missing an opportunity here." With technology we have more and more ways to share Christ with people. I have a dream of putting a big billboard out on the south side of I-20 someday. I want everyone traveling to the casinos to read it. It will have a stack of chips displayed with these words in bold print: "DON'T GAMBLE WITH YOUR ETERNITY." Below that in smaller letters it says: For directions to heaven: www.go2heaven.org (And you can't get there by boat!) And when they look up that link, they are taken to our web page with a specially prepared message of how to go to heaven. We must seize *every* opportunity to share Christ!

(2) Season every conversation with graceful words

The King James Version says, "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt." Salt performs several functions. For instance, I love grits. I can eat them for breakfast or for supper, but there's an art to cooking grits. They have to be just thick enough so when you put the spoon in the pot, it falls over slowly. If the spoon sticks, they're too thick, if it falls over quickly, they're too soupy. Not long ago I cooked grits and they were the perfect consistency, but when I tasted them, I went, "Yuck!" I had forgotten to put the salt in the water before it boiled—they were bland and tasteless. Salt adds seasoning and spice. Even so, our conversation should be full of interesting and tasteful things about the Christian life. We should season our conversations with graceful words, which are kind, positive, and encouraging.

Salt also creates thirst. Have you ever had a salty meal, and it seemed like you couldn't drink enough water? In the same way, our conversation should be full of such wonderful things about the Lord, that it creates a desire, a thirst, in the lives of outsiders. This is what happened when

Jesus was talking to the woman at the well. He told her about living water that could quench her thirst so she would never have to drink again. As Jesus talked to her about God, His salty comments created a spiritual thirst for her until she said, "Please sir, give me this water." When you talk about the grace, goodness, and mercy of God to others, it will create a spiritual thirst for them like salt. But be careful how much salt you use, because too much salt can spoil a meal.

Sometimes even the gifted speakers don't get their message across. Billy Graham enjoys telling about a time in his ministry when he arrived in a small town to preach. Wanting to mail a letter, he asked a young boy where the post office was. When the boy had told him, Dr. Graham thanked him and said, "If you'll come to the Church this evening, you can hear me telling everyone how to get to Heaven." The boy replied, "I don't think I'll be there because you don't even know your way to the post office."

CONCLUSION

Remember, God's plan is to get insiders out to get outsiders in. I love the story Jesus told in Luke 14 about a rich man who threw a great party and invited many guests. When the table was set with the sumptuous meal, the servants were sent out to say, "The feast is ready! Come and get it!"

But all the invited guests started making excuses. I've said before "an excuse is the skin of the truth stuffed with a lie." One guy said, "I've bought some land and I've got to go see it." (Who buys land they haven't seen? And besides, it was nighttime.) Another guy said, "I just bought some oxen and I've got to go check them out." Now let's see, "Big party, lot's of food?" or "Smelly, dirty oxen?" That should be a no-brainer. A third guy probably gave the best excuse. He said, "I just got married—and my wife won't let me."

When the Master heard this, he was disappointed those he invited refused to come in to his party. These three guys represent outsiders who rejected God's invitation to come inside His family. Psalm 53:1 says, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" The Hebrew language is more succinct. It literally says, "No God." This isn't referring to intellectual atheism; it refers to someone who simply says, "No, God." It would be like someone offering you cherry pie for dessert and you saying, "No cherry pie for me." You're not saying cherry pie doesn't exist, you're just declining it. A fool is someone who has been invited to God's party and refuses His offer, "No, God, none for me." How would you feel if you threw an expensive Christmas party and sent out dozens of invitations and on the night of the party NONE of them showed up? That's the disappointment the Father must feel toward those who make excuses to His Divine invitation.

When these three men made their lame excuses, the master didn't cancel the party. He just widened his invitation list. As Jesus continued the story, the master gave this command to his servants. This is the same thing our Master is saying to us today: "Go out quickly into the streets and alleys. Collect all who look like they need a square meal, all the misfits and homeless and wretched you can lay your hands on, and bring them here...Then go to the country roads. Whoever you find, drag them in. I want my house full!" (Luke 14:21-23)

Are you an insider? God's command is for you to pray for outsiders and engage them in salty, graceful conversation. Will you make a "Most Wanted for Jesus" list and carry it with you for the next year?

Do you feel like you're outside God's family right now? I have good news for you. God's arms are open wide. He is inviting you today to come into His inner circle of beloved children. Right now Jesus is standing at the door of your heart. He is patiently knocking saying, "Let me come in and change your life. I will forgive your sins and make you a new person." Will you open the door of your heart and allow Jesus to come inside you? When you do, He makes you an insider in His family.

So to put it simply, our strategy is: Inside Out & Outside In!

OUTLINE

Insiders = Believers

Outsiders = Pre-Believers

God's Plan: To get Insiders to get Outsiders

1. BE WATCHFUL AS YOU PRAY FOR OUTSIDERS (v. 2-3)

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- (1) Ask God to remove obstacles blocking their way to God
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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes