

SESSION 4

Live the Message



QUESTION 1:

What's a positive example of actions speaking louder than words?

THE POINT

How we live reflects on the message we share.

THE PASSAGES

Colossians 3:1-3,12-17

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Most businesses in America are known simply for what they sell. We don't often give thought to the values and ethics behind those goods and services. It's rare—but refreshing—when we hear of businesses that are as well known for their values as for what they sell. One of the most well-known corporations with strong values and practices is Hobby Lobby®.

The CEO of Hobby Lobby, David Green, is unashamed of his faith. He has built a “Christian culture” in which he leads others to lean on God in prayer. He depends on the Bible to guide his business decisions. But this is not merely a face he puts on for the public. He sees management as the servants of the employees, and he seeks to live that out with his employees.

- ▶ Employees are paid well above the minimum wage.
- ▶ Stores close early enough to allow parents to tuck their kids into bed.
- ▶ Employees have Sundays off.

Our lives must match what we say in public. As we tell others about Jesus, it's equally important that they see Jesus in us.

Colossians 3:1-3

1 If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

KEY WORDS: **The right hand of God** (v. 1)—A position of power and privilege, emphasizing the rule of Christ over all creation. The phrase would have been associated with the deity of Christ outlined in chapters 1–2.

It's easy to get caught up in the things of this world. Our culture influences everything from clothing and lifestyles to the definition and value of relationships. Long-term commitment to anything—jobs, relationships, responsibilities, and even homes—is on the decline. Culture now experiences a consistent influx of change. Technology adds another dynamic to our ever-changing world. Our cell phones can feel outdated within the first six months of purchasing because the next “best thing” has already come along.

With so much change in our world, it's not wise to try to constantly keep up with trends. What's in today can be out tomorrow, and we find ourselves running to catch up again. People who pursue life with this focus never find fulfillment. Driven by a need for something new, something different, or something better, satisfaction is fleeting. Fortunately, Jesus Christ isn't like the world. He never changes, but He's never outdated. He's the one perfect constant we can always turn to.

Paul wrote of the confidence we find in Jesus and warned us against seeking the things of this world. As we identify with Christ, we let go of the world's priorities and allow Him access and authority over our lives. By doing so, we demonstrate to others

that we are under His authority. Modeling an authentic Christian life may not be easy at times, and others may criticize our beliefs, practices, and morality. They may see our values as culturally antiquated and irrelevant, but that's far from truth.

When we make a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, we are identifying with His personhood and character. We are joined with Him in death, dying to our old life, and our new resurrected life in Christ is revealed, displaying a new way of walking and talking that glorifies Him. Instead of allowing our worldly, sinful nature to run things, we can live humble, Christ-like lives in submission to God the Father.

My husband is known as a gentle giant with his large six-foot-four-inch, three-hundred-plus-pound stature. I've always felt protected and safe whenever I'm with him because his presence can literally cover me. Next to my five-foot-six-inch stature, he looms even larger. During a speaking event, I spoke about how we are covered and identified in Christ. I asked my husband to stand directly in front of me, between me and the audience. Though people could hear me speaking, all they saw was him. Paul wrote, "Your life is hid with Christ in God." Our identity with Christ means that when people look at us, they should see Jesus.

Having a Christ-like character requires dying to self and submitting to the authority and lordship of Jesus. To identify ourselves as followers of Jesus without exemplifying His character leads others to view us as hypocrites, inauthentic, and outright fake. If we're not different from the world, they see no need to follow Jesus. We are called to be "the real deal," living in authentic relationship to Him and reflecting Him to the world.

QUESTION 2:

How exactly do we set our heart and mind on things above?

Colossians 3:12-15

12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;

13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

14 And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.

What exactly is involved in maintaining a godly character? Paul identified several godly traits we are to “put on” and wear. As God’s chosen ones, loved and set apart for His glory, we are to display the same traits and behavior that Jesus Himself did. For the world to see Jesus reflected through us, we must be willing to clothe ourselves with Him.

When trying to decide what to wear for the day, I regularly check the weather forecast. Weather conditions can vary greatly in the Pacific Northwest. But the “clothes” of a godly character we are to put on are always appropriate regardless of the spiritual climate around us. We should set aside the old clothes of “anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication (Col 3:8)” when we “put off the old man” (v. 9), clothing ourselves instead with “bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering.” When we dress this way, the presence of Christ prevails in us.

Paul provided specific instructions on dealing with conflict by “forbearing one another,” through patience and longsuffering. We also need forgiveness to help us avoid the dangers of an unforgiving heart. As we acknowledge our own need for forgiveness from Christ, it’s easier to forgive others who have harmed or offended us.

DIGGING DEEPER

CLOTHE YOURSELVES WITH CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

Continuing the metaphor of changing clothes, Paul turned to the new look of the believer. Paul had said the believers had put on the new self. Now he said they were to put on specific characteristics of the Christian; presumably these are characteristics of the new self. This represents the tension between the position and practice of the believer. The Christian is a new self, but he must learn to act like it.

Clothe yourselves with Christian characteristics—The new clothing of the Christian begins with personal attributes: compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. The entire context is slanted toward harmony in the church. Significantly, Paul focused on the individual who is to have patience, rather than the one who caused a problem. The place to begin in any group tension is with oneself rather than others.

Enduring and forgiving—The terms called the believers to a high

standard of personal action when offended. “Enduring” is putting up with others even when they fail or act differently from what is expected. “Forgiving” is based on the root word for “grace.” It carries the idea of a free forgiveness, perhaps because of grace. These two qualities were linked in Paul’s mind as they often are in practice.

Love—The term chosen is the most frequent in the New Testament, *agapē*. Consistently it describes God’s love, as well as the love Christians should have for God, the world, and each other. Paul urged the Colossians to put on love above all these other things. It was uniquely important to their social well-being. Paul stated that love uniquely tied them together (“the perfect bond of unity” [3:14]). The expression means that mutual love would bring the group to perfection. By this expression Paul meant that the love would bind them together unto completeness.

Richard R. Melick, Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol 32 in *The New American Commentary*, David S. Dockery, gen. ed., (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), Wordsearch ed.

God’s desire is for us to be one with Him and with each other—and nothing brings us together in unity like love! In His love, God provides His peace which rules and reigns as we trust Him. Covering ourselves in God’s love protects us, and it draws others to the Christ they see in us. “By this shall all men know that ye are my

disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). Finally, we can maintain a godly character by being thankful for all that God has done for us.

We should seek every opportunity to put Jesus on display. Consistently displaying godly character enables Him to be at the forefront of our lives, and this ensures that people will encounter Him through us. Without a consistent mindset of “Christ first,” it’s easy to conform to the patterns of this world instead of being transformed by Him. Donning a wardrobe of godly character ensures others will see, hear, and feel the presence of Jesus when they see us. We dress for kingdom success when we wear the character of Christ.

QUESTION 3:

What are some practical steps believers can take to put on the character of Christ?

ENGAGE

Use the space below to grade yourself on each characteristic listed in Colossians 3:12-15, with a score of 1 meaning you don’t do this well and a score of 10 meaning you display this characteristic very well.

Compassion	1	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	10
Kindness	1	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	10
Humility	1	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	10
Gentleness	1	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	10
Patience	1	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	10
Forgiveness	1	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	10
Love	1	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	10
Thankfulness	1	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	10

Colossians 3:16-17

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

The best way to learn more about God is through His Word, and the believer's life is the most common way people encounter Jesus. When believers allow the Word of God to take up residence and dwell in them, we can't help but reveal Christ. This is one of the reasons Paul encouraged believers to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." To *dwell* means to abide for a time. The Word of God needs to dwell in us to transform us from natural, worldly people to Spirit-led believers who honor Christ. Paul admonished us to let the Word dwell in us *richly*—in abundance—permeating every aspect of our beings. The Word of God needs to consume our lives, pushing aside anything that does not reflect the glory of God.

As we allow the word to take up residence within us, the result is a flood of godly wisdom which overflows to others in a variety of ways. The rich truths of God's Word can be taught and encouraged through various forms of music. While the terms have some overlap between their meanings, Paul identified:

- ▶ **Psalms.** The sacred poems and songs from the Old Testament Book of Psalms.
- ▶ **Hymns.** Festive songs of praise; songs that tell of our faith and God's faithfulness.
- ▶ **Spiritual songs.** A variety of musical compositions.

We are to sing all forms of music and songs to the Lord with a heart of thankfulness. We should maintain an "attitude of gratitude," looking at life from a position of all we have instead of what we don't have. To possess a heart of gratitude is to view life from a perspective of contentment instead of dissatisfaction.

QUESTION 4:

How has music helped shape your knowledge and understanding of God?

No matter what we do, we are to express thanks to God and “do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.” In other words, every word and every action are to be done with a conscious recognition of Christ’s lordship, authority, and reputation. He is Lord over all we do, and we offer Him thanks for all He does. Christ has given us the privilege of upholding His reputation and making Him known.

I hope you see how important it is to demonstrate our faith to others through our character and our actions. A verbal witness of God’s love and salvation is backed up by the lives we lead. People may want to debate theology and religion, but they can’t argue with a life centered in and transformed by Christ. The lives we lead in Christ speak volumes.

Share Jesus Without Fear:**Bill Fay’s Testimony**

Before becoming a Christian, Bill Fay was a successful businessman who became connected with the Mafia and started a house of prostitution. At this time in his life, Bill started having encounters with Christians who shared their faith and talked about inner peace through a relationship with Jesus Christ. This is Bill’s story:

“For the next year, Christians came into my life to tell me about the person of Jesus Christ. When they did, they were insulted, persecuted, and antagonized. Many of them walked away, believing they failed. But I never forgot the name, the face, the words, or any one of them who told me about the Lord Jesus.”

QUESTION 5:

What opportunities will you have to live out these verses in your normal, everyday routines?

LIVE IT OUT

How will you ensure your actions align with the message you share?

- ▶ **Confess.** Are there any areas of your life that don't align with the message of Christ? Pray and ask God to reveal any sins or habits. Confess those and repent.
- ▶ **Accept correction.** Give a trusted friend permission to point out times when you are thinking more like the world and not like Christ.
- ▶ **Share.** As God gives you opportunities to share your faith, be willing to admit your own sin and failure. It's important to be transparent, but keep the focus on Christ who has forgiven and transformed you.



END NOTES

1. Jerry Bowyer, "What Makes Hobby Lobby a Christian Company? Hint: It's Not a Greed or a Misogyny Thing," *Forbes*, April 25, 2017, www.forbes.com/sites/jerrybowyer/2017/04/25/what-makes-hobby-lobby-a-christian-company-hint-its-not-a-greed-or-a-misogyny-thing/#6ccff09736d9.