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Becoming People of Influence

COMPELLED: The Joy and Simplicity of Introducing People to Jesus

Colossians 4:2-6

Keith Davy
Cru's Executive Director of Research and Development

(Jeff Petersen) During the message last weekend, Bryan introduced a book that we all want to read together this month as we think about how we can become more effective in having meaningful conversations with people that lead to opportunities to sharing just what Jesus has done in each of our lives. The book is called *42 Seconds*. If you weren't here last week, we invite you to pick up a copy at any Information Center. We invite you to take one per family and begin the journey of reading it with us. This past week we read the first section with simple reminders to *Be Kind*, to think outside of ourselves about others. I was encouraged to remember to not just keep going into the cul-de-sac, into the garage and shutting the door. This time of year is a perfect time to change that pattern. Just a couple of nights ago, we got home and, instead of just going in the house, we grabbed a couple of chairs and went out to the end of the driveway, and within minutes we were in a great conversation with one of our neighbors. So, this coming week we want to read the second section which reminds us to *Be Present,* and next weekend we will recap that.

This morning we have the opportunity to hear from Keith Davy. Keith joined the staff of Campus Crusade for Christ, now simply called Cru in 1976 and, in 1986 the Lord called Keith and his family back to Lincoln, to his alma mater, to direct the ministry at the University of Nebraska. I happened to be a student at the University of Nebraska at that time and many of you have heard me share my story before. Some of you may even remember me talking about one fateful night when I was student body president and I was on a trip to southern Florida. Out of great despair and anguish in my life, I took what I intended to be a one-way swim out into the Atlantic Ocean. Far from shore, in the utter darkness of 2 a.m. and in the utter despair of my soul, I found myself literally crying out to God to come and change my life. It was about two weeks later back in Lincoln, when I was down at the student union and I ran into Keith. Keith and I had known each other for about two years at that point, but Keith had always known me to be one of those students who hid on the peripheral edges of Christianity. By the grace of God, somehow it was different this time, and I can honestly say with genuine confidence that one of the primary ways God answered that ocean prayer was through the life of Keith Davy, as God used him over the next couple of years to pour his life into mine as he opened the Scriptures and taught me the Word of God. Keith and his wonderful wife Nancy not only delighted to share the good news but also their very lives with me as well. In fact, even inviting me, after graduation, to come and live with their family for a season, even though the timing was pretty terrible as Nancy had just given birth to their fourth child. I can say with full confidence the person you are going to hear from this morning was used by God to change my life. He was used by God to change many lives of students here in Lincoln and they were a part of Lincoln Berean for all of their years here in the city. In 1997 God wanted to expand Keith's influence and so he called the Davy's to Orlando, Florida, where they have been at the headquarters of Cru and Keith has been the executive director or research and development for the past twenty-two years.

One of the central themes of his works has been trying to understand, "How do we as believers effectively enter into conversations with people about the good news of Jesus Christ?" Through his

research, resources and training, Keith has been used in countless lives to help with this. So when we as staff were talking about this series, we thought, "Wouldn't it be great to hear from someone who knows us, but who has also been outside of our context and who has given a lifetime to trying to better understand the very thing that we are talking about this month?" We are so thrilled that Keith and Nancy agreed to come and be with us, so would you join me in giving a warm, Lincoln Berean welcome to Keith Davy as he comes to share the Word of God today. *(Clapping)*

Thank you, Jeff. Well, it is a delight to be back at Lincoln Berean for the first time in twenty-two years, and nothing has changed. Lincoln Berean looks exactly the same and I'm the same, right? Well now, there *has* been a lot of change. We would label it here at Lincoln Berean as progress, but when you speak of me, well, it might be a different adjective, but we won't go there. Changing the subject to the theme, I was delighted to be invited to share as part of this series: COMPELLED—I love that word *compelled*. A dictionary definition for it is *to have a powerful and irresistible influence…*to have a powerful and irresistible influence! Now, let me set you at ease. That powerful and irresistible isn't ours; that's actually God and the gospel. How do we step into what He is doing in the lives of those around us, the lives of those who don't yet know Jesus Christ? How do we become part of their journey? That's what we want to explore together this morning.

Let me begin by telling you a story. It's not really my story; it's Marvin and Priscilla's story, but I was able to enter in for just a short moment in their journey. It all happened one afternoon when I was sitting on the porch at the *Night Swan Bed and Breakfast* in New Smyrna Beach, Florida. It was our executive team retreat and it was a free afternoon, so everyone else was out enjoying their free time, but I was sitting on the porch grading papers because I had just gotten done teaching an Institute of Biblical Studies course on evangelism and apologetics, so of course I had papers to grade. While I was grading papers, this couple rides up on their bicycles and they got off their bikes. The woman spoke to me first. She said, "Are you the owner?" I kind of chuckled—thought, "I'd like to be"—but, "No, just a guest." She said, "Well, is the owner here?" and I said, "I'm not sure," so I went in and checked, and he wasn't around…came back and told her so. She said, "Well, the reason we stopped is we wanted to see if he might have an odd job or something we could do to earn a little bit of money, but I'm curious, would you have five dollars that you could give to us?" I said, "Well, yes, maybe, but I don't know anything about you. Tell me about yourself." So, she began to relate a little bit of their story to me and their situation, and I was thinking about my papers back on the porch, but I was also thinking about the people in front of me. I said, "Well, I tell you what, do you have time?" They said, "We have all kinds of time," so I said, "Why don't you come up on the porch and tell me your story." So they came up and sat down and Priscilla and Marvin began to relate their story. She shared first, being the more conversational of the two, but eventually I turned to Marvin and Marvin began to tell me his story. Marvin had worked in a variety of jobs. He had been with the police department at one time, first responder at another, but one season he was working in tree trimming and he was up on a limb trimming the tree, with his co-worker holding the ropes to secure things, when the co-worker failed to do so. Marvin was knocked off the limb and fell to the ground where he landed on his head, was knocked unconscious and in a coma for three months. He had absolutely no memory of that season—that time in his life—but when he got done telling the story, he looked up and pointed up and he said, "He rescued me." Well, that kind of led into this spiritual conversation where we talked about where they were in their spiritual journey, and I had a chance to see that they were very much on their journey, but had not yet come to the point of trusting Christ. So I asked if I could share a little bit of something that might help them. They said, "Yes," so we talked about a relationship with Christ and some of the Scriptures and when I came to the end of that part of the conversation and I asked if I could pray with them, they said, "Sure," and so they took my hands and I was just praying for their situation and praying

for their salvation. At the end of that, as we began to visit, I was going to encourage them to take that step and Marvin says, "Well I did that," and I said, "Oh, you have done that?" and I said, "When did you do that?" and he said, "Right now, right when you were praying." "Oh, you just prayed that?" and I looked at him and there were tears coming down his eyes and Priscilla looked over at him and saw the tears and in a kind of a playful way she reached over and swatted him and said, "Stop that or you'll make me cry." In that touching moment, that wasn't about what I was doing; that was about what God was doing in their lives. By the way, I did give them $20 at the end of the conversation, but I share this story to illustrate two things for you.

The first is, "Everyone's life is a story, and every story is worth hearing." Or another way you could say it is that, "No one can escape being interesting if you are interested enough to find out about their story." Alright, so everyone's life—just like Marvin and Priscilla's lives—has a story. The second thing it illustrates is, "Everyone is on a spiritual journey. They can't help it because God has created them as spiritual beings. Now they may be moving toward God; they may be moving away from God. They may be chasing other gods that aren't God at all. They may be stuck in a spiritual quagmire and not moving, but they are on a spiritual journey." We don't *start* people's spiritual journeys. We only enter into them and when we do, we can discover where God is at work and, as He orchestrates circumstances, as He moves by the Spirit inside their lives and their souls, we can discover what part He wants to use us to play in their journeys.

That's what we want to explore this morning and we will do that by using Colossians, Chapter 4, verses 2 through 6. So, if you have your Bibles with you—Bible or phone or pad or whatever it is you use—turn to Colossians chapter 4, and we will begin by reading the whole passage and then we will walk back through it because Paul gives us a portrait of what it means to be involved and this influence that God has in others' lives. He starts by saying:

> **Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it and 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.** (*ESV Colossians 4: 2-6)

Now if you were to summarize what Paul has said here, you might say that our influence in the lives of others is a combined result of three things: our prayers, our conduct, and our conversations, and so let's take a look at how Paul frames each one of those. He starts with our prayers; it all begins with prayer. He says:

> **Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it and with thanksgiving.** (Vs. 2)

That really tells us how we are to pray. He uses that phrase **continue steadfastly** or perhaps your version—New International or New American—has the words, "*Devote yourselves to prayer*." I like that those together—**continue steadfastly—**has the idea that it's ongoing, not an event, but an ongoing lifestyle, a continual thing of praying. Devoted is to give intense effort toward something. We are to be giving ourselves to prayer, but he says, how? **Watchful and with thanksgiving.** Why? **Watchful** is that idea of being alert, being attentive, being aware of what is going on, paying attention to the situation and, in this case, to the people in our lives—what God is doing and seeing what we can discover about other people's lives and journeys, and how God is at work in them. The idea of **thanksgiving**, of course *gratefulness*, grateful for what? Well grateful that this is God at

work. From the beginning to the end, it's all first and foremost a work of God. Think about it. It was God who planned this whole plan of salvation. He was the one who sent His Son to be the Savior of the world, to die on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, to rise from the dead, to reign now as Lord of all, to come into the lives—not only our lives—but others, to change them from the inside out—to send us as His gospel messengers and as His people to share that message with others. It's the work of God; we just become a part of what He's doing. So, we should be thankful, thankful for the broad strokes of what God is doing, but thankful for the situations that we find ourselves in for the people who are part of our lives. If that's how we are to pray—continually, devoted, steadfast, watchful, thankful—then he also tells us what we are to pray for, and here Paul applies it to himself. He urges them:

> **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.** (Vs. 3-4)

See, he asked for two things. He asked for *open doors* or opportunities for him to be able to engage in the lives of others and *to share the Word of Christ* with others. And he asks for clarity of message so that he could make it clear so that they could understand and experience what it is that he is sharing with them. Now, we'll only pray in this way and pray these things if we believe it's important, and we think it makes a difference. Right? You'll only engage in this kind of prayer if you believe it's important and you know it will make a difference, and yet when we think about it, we know prayer matters; we know it makes a difference. Since this is always first and foremost the work of God, it always begins with our prayers.

I think of my own journey, my own family. When I was a college student here at the University of Nebraska, involved in a campus ministry, we had a prayer chain in which we would pair up and every week go in and pray at the same time. We had a little index box; it was actually a rolodex of index cards that you'd write each individual prayer request on, and in the salvation section I had written my dad's name down. For three years we prayed for my father's salvation every week, over and over again. As people shared in this prayer chain, and through those three years, I saw my father enter into a spiritual journey where, for the first time in his life, he became part of a Christ-centered, Bible-teaching church as he started to go with my mom and me when I would go home on break. He became involved in the lives of some men. Men began to invest in his life and invited him to become part of a small group and a Bible study, and so when I graduated from college, I was out in California doing some training, when I got a letter from my father and he shared about what he was learning and experiencing in the church and in a seminar he had been attending at the church. I knew when I read that letter, his life had changed. He had passed through the threshold of faith. Now, almost forty-five years later, he's still walking with God. I was just with him yesterday—94 years old—still walking with God, and through those years, he's not only grown in his faith, he's lead Bible studies; he's served as a leader in his church, and now he's in his twilight days. God changed him. Why? It wasn't what I did; it was prayer that laid the foundation for that. But it doesn't always work that way. Nancy and I have been praying for various family members and relatives for forty-five years and they too are on a journey, but not all of them have come to faith yet, but we keep praying.

It's not just family members; it's the other people in our lives, and I need a lot of help here. I need a lot of help because I can easily forget the people that are around me. And so the last couple of years I signed up and have been using this website called pray4everyhome.org. Pray for every home, but the 4 is the number 4 by the way, if you get interested to look it up. What they do is they actually

take all of my neighborhood and they send me five names every day in my email with a little prayer prompt and it reminds me just to pray for some of our neighbors. They work through five a day for twenty different days, so over the course of praying on twenty different days, I pray for one hundred of my neighbors, and then it circles back. What that does is it raises my awareness to pray for my neighbors, to be alert to what's God is doing in the lives and the stories of my neighbors—to be alert, to be thankful, but to seek the opportunities. It all begins with prayer, but while it begins with prayer, there is more than prayer. Paul goes on and says that the second element of our influence is our *conduct*; it's what we *do*, not just what we pray; it's what we **do**. He says that we are to act wisely or as he wrote it:

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. (Vs. 5)

Using that word **walk**, that's journey language. It's part of a lifestyle, ongoing—step by step, moment by moment—but we are to walk **in wisdom toward outsiders**, that is those who don't yet know Christ, who haven't entered into His family through faith in Jesus as their Savior and Lord. How are we to act toward them? "With wisdom," he says, "**making the** most or the **best use of the time**." He says two things. We will take the second one first: **make the best use of the time.** Now that word **time**—in the original language there are two different Greek words that can be translated time. One—*chronos*—is what we think of and we would use in chronology. Let's say it's time in the sense of seconds, minutes, like you measure on your watch. It's days and the calendar; it's time in a measurement. Paul's not saying *chronos* here; he's not saying, "Make the best use of your time as in time management;" that's not his idea. He's using the other word, which is *kairos*, which is time in the sense of moments, opportunities, which is why many translations actually use, instead of time, *opportunity* there. What Paul is saying is that we are to make the most of those opportunities that fill our life—that life as we walk through it is a series, a sequence of different opportunities. "Make the most of each one," he said.

In your book that you have begun to read, Carl Medearis' *42 Seconds*, it's the second chapter where he titles it, "Acknowledge the Waiter". What is he saying? He's simply saying, "Notice the people around you. Notice who is in your life; notice those people that are already there." You wonder, "Well how many people are in my life?" As we are involved in evangelism research or training, one of the most common obstacles that believers have is they think, "I don't know who I would ever engage; I don't really have relationships like this." Yet, if we just do what Jesus said, "Lift up our eyes and see," we would discover, we would see there are actually a lot. In fact, do you know there is a Columbia University Researcher who set out to discover how many people the average American knows, and through their research methodology and all, do you know what they came up with? If you're an average American, you could name 600 people by name. Some more, some less, but the average is that we know about 600 people by name. That's a lot of opportunities.

There is a research group in the marketing field, and they were not just interested in who you know by name, but how many people would your life touch over the course of a lifetime? Through their methodology, if you live in a city—Lincoln is a city—they estimated that your life would intersect or touch 80,000 people during the course of your lifetime. Now that could be the waiter Carl Medearis mentions; it would be that cashier at the register in a store. It could be a family member, a friend, a neighbor; it could be somebody at work. It may be a momentary touch; it may be a long-term relationship. However many it is in our lives, it is a lot if we just open our eyes to the opportunities that are there, and how? By noticing the people already around us.

Now Paul says the second thing about walking wisely is, **walk in wisdom toward outsiders**. So, what's the idea of wisdom? Well, **wisdom** is that *skill of living rightly based on a correct understanding of life.* God bestows on us His wisdom and He leads us to grow in our wisdom. Now J.I. Packer has an interesting statement about God's wisdom. He says, "God is all wise," right? What does that mean about God? It means that He always knows the best end and the best means to accomplish that end. That's what God's wisdom is like. He always knows the best outcome, the best end of anything and everything. He knows the best means to go about and accomplish that. So, think about that in the context of what Paul is saying here: "**Walk in wisdom toward outsiders**." What that means is that each individual, in light of their story, their journey, that you walk wisely toward them. What's the best end? What's the best outcome, the best thing that could happen for them in this moment, at this time, and what part can I play within that? That's walking wisely toward outsiders.

Medearis in *42 Seconds* refers to the first chapter as, *Say Hey*; remember reading that this week? *Say Hey*—what's that really all about? It's just how you engage people initially. One of the most powerful questions you can ask is also one of the most common questions that's asked. It's just, "How are you?" Only when we ask it, too often we don't really care how a person is; it's just kind of this casual greeting, isn't it. How are you? The answer you expect is, "Fine." Well, I'm fine could mean they are great or it could mean they are terrible; you have no idea what that fine means. If you would care enough to actually find out how people are when you ask. "How are you," but maybe you could add, "How's it going?" When they discover you really care and begin to share their lives, you will discover where they are at in their life story…their journey.

In our neighborhood, our mailboxes are all together in one of these mail stations and so I walked down one day to get our mail and Mike who, at that time—he's now moved, but he was living down the block about 5 houses—had come to get his mail. Well, Mike and I lived in identical homes and because we live in identical homes, it meant that our homes had the identical problem—a construction issue that when they put in the window above the garage, they didn't do it correctly and so it leaked. Mike and I were visiting about, "What are you going to do about your window? Well, here's what we are doing about our window." We are talking about our houses and how we are going to fix this problem, and I said to him, "Well, Mike, beyond the windows, how is the rest of life going?" He said, "Well, it's getting better," and then he kind of moved on in the conversation, and I thought, "…getting better?" You know what that is? That's a window into his soul. That suggests there is something more going on, so I said to him, "I'm curious; you said it's getting better, what's going on?" He began to tell me, and for the first time we had a conversation below the surface. He began to tell me about the problems at work, which had led to financial problems, which was putting stress on their marriage, and with the stress on their marriage it was driving the kids nuts, and so he unloaded all of this down at the mailbox. Why? Just because I cared enough to say, "What's going on?" See, when you ask people how they are, when you get into their life and begin to really care, they will reveal what you could call windows into their soul. It's those pictures inside their life where you can see what's going on. Often when you see that, you will discover unmet needs and when you discover those unmet needs, then it gives you clues of what you can do to love them, to serve them, to do a small thing, to be kind as Medearis suggests. So, we pray continually; we act wisely, but Paul says there is still one more. It's, "Speak gracefully". We're to speak gracefully; that's our conversations with individuals. It says:

> **Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.** (Vs. 6)

Now Paul uses the words **always** and with **each** or every **person**. You see, it's everyone that is around us we are to be aware of, we are to be wise with, we are to speak gracefully with. It's each and every person, but you notice Paul says **so that you may know how to answer each person**. That word **answer** is interesting…intriguing. It suggests that we are responding to them. Now what Paul is not suggesting here is, "Don't talk until they ask you a question;" that's not his idea here. His idea is, "You know the individual; you discover what is true in their life…their story…their journey…where there's an opportunity, and you know how to answer them, how to respond to them, uniquely, individually to each person. You listen to their stories to discover these things. You know what happens when you do that? You demonstrate love and care for a person. If you listen to a person, you are actually ministering to them. Harvard phycologists have done studies and you know what they discovered people's favorite subject to talk about is? That's right—themselves! We just naturally, about sixty percent of the time, will just talk about ourselves and they said there's a physiological reason for it—because it actually makes us feel good, not just emotionally, but there's a physical response that's tied up in it too. It's so real that people will pay money, according to their studies, just so they can talk about themselves. Now we're not out for money; we're out to love people, right? When you love people, you listen to people and when you listen to people you discover where they are, who they are, where they are at in their journey and what their story is, and perhaps how God is at work, and how He wants to use you.

Medearis says in *42 Seconds,* "Ask another question…ask another question." The idea is that there's always the possibility to take that conversation to another step deeper by just simply asking another question. Jesus was the master at this. You know how many questions Jesus asked? I don't either, by the way, however, I do know this: that in the gospels there are one hundred thirty-five different questions recorded from the lips of Jesus, which is an amazing amount when you think of how small a corpus of teaching we have from Him. So, when you ask questions of people's lives, you are like your Master. You are following the example of your Master to discover, to illuminate, to find out what is true, and to demonstrate love for them. Well, Paul has said that our influence is going to be tied to our prayers—how we pray—to our conduct—what we do—and to our conversations—what we say.

So, let me end with just one more story. This occurred a few years ago. I was in Denver; I'd just finished up some meetings. I had gone to the airport; I was getting onto the plane and it was at that moment when they are telling you to turn your phone onto airplane mode, and right before I did, the phone rings and I see it's Nancy, so I real quick answered and I said, "Hey, Nancy, I'm on the flight; I've got to turn off my phone," but I just answered real quick and she said, "Okay, well, when you get to Chicago," (my layover) "call me because I just got bit by a dog and the owner is spiritually interested, I think." *(laughter)*. I'm like, "Okay, I'm calling you!". We fly to Chicago and I get back on the phone and, "Okay, Nancy, what's going on here, and are you alright?" She's tells me this story of how she went out on her daily, morning jog and, as she got out of our house and was ready to run the loop around, she noticed in the yard this strange looking stray dog and it was a large, wrinkly dog that was bred in China to protect the Chinese Emperor. I don't know why it's not over in China, what it was doing in our yard *(laughter)* but there's this dog there. So she goes and runs around and does her loop and when she comes back on the other side, she's coming up the sidewalk and she sees an SUV drive up and the guy rolls down his window and he starts calling for his dog, and Nancy thinks, "Oh, great, the owner has found his dog," and as she's coming up the driveway, she gets too close to being in between the owner and the dog, and the dog instinctively attacks her and bites her on the arm. Well, the owner grabs the dog, throws it in the car, drives home, comes back to the house with the rabies papers, a get-well card, and a box of chocolates. So, Nancy begins to talk to him as they are standing on the porch, and finding out a little bit about him,

it turns out that his name is Greg. He actually just lived down at the end of the block and turn right, into the cul-de-sac. He is a young man, working in the area, but also taking classes at the university, finishing his degree. He had grown up in Columbia; his mother was Columbian, his father from Wisconsin, but had come to America to do his college studies so he wouldn't have to serve in the Columbian military army. Well, as they visited, Nancy began to just explore his journey and his life, which is quite an amazing thing to think about in the midst of her circumstance, but she was making the most of every opportunity and discovered that his New Year's resolution was to get closer to God. So Nancy said, "Well, when my husband gets home from his trip, we will have you come over and we can figure out what to do about the bite and all," and so I got home and the next night Greg came over to our house and he brought his girlfriend with him, which I suppose if you are going to go talk to someone about your dog bite and his wife, you want all the moral support you can get. He and his girlfriend are there, so we invite them in to sit down, but we didn't go to the dog bite right away, rather, "Tell us your story," and we begin to learn who they are and find out about them. It turned out that as we did that, the conversation just naturally began talking about their spiritual journey and we discovered openness, so we talked about a relationship with Christ and we prayed together that evening. But as we prayed, Greg's girlfriend prayed this, "God, you know I have been asking you for a sign. Thank you for sending these people to be a sign to me."

That's God! That's God at work! You don't orchestrate those kinds of things. That's God who is doing those kinds of things, which by the way caused me a bit of a theological problem, which was: How is it…why did you have to send a dog to bite my wife as a sign for this young woman?" It was as if God said, "Well, if you would meet your neighbors, I wouldn't have to." *(laughter)* Not really! The real message of it is: we make the most of every opportunity…every opportunity! How? By how we pray, by what we do, and by what we say. Let me pray for you.

> *Father, we do pray that you would make us ever more like our Master, who genuinely not only prayed, but loved people well and spoke with great grace. Give us the ability to be like Him in the lives of others around us. Thank you, Lord; we pray in Christ's name. Amen.*

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