

Love's True Grit - Part four, love is timely

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BIG IDEA - Love's GRIT is seeing and seizing opportunities, understanding that interruptions and inconveniences are often God-moments.

scripture focus - Colossians 4:5-6 NLT

"Live wisely among those who are not believers and **make the most of every opportunity**. Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone."

How many of you like a deal or discount? Do you consider yourself a savvy shopper, spotting a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and snapping it up before someone else steals YOUR sale? Then you are going to love this week's message on Love's GRIT, the last message in our series - love is timely!

Neighboring is a choice to see the moment and seize the opportunity. Sometimes we hit it off immediately with someone. We find that these people are "easy to love." Sometimes it takes a long while (even years) for neighboring to make an impact (even if we don't see the harvest/fruit). Sometimes it just doesn't work at all. And, we have to admit, some folks are just hard to love.

You want me to believe that being a good neighbor is about personality, hospitality or extroverted courage that you just don't have. I want you to see that's not the truth.

The number-one **obstacle** to neighboring well is **time**.

Our job is to take advantage of it and not fight against it.

Paul writing to the church of Colosse shows the amazing ability for Paul to adapt his past, his completely Jewish training, into a fresh, timely Word from God fitting to the Gentile culture of the city. Paul, with a team of people, namely Epaphras, a native of Colosse (4:12), was disciplining the new believers in their faith.

Colossians 4:5-6 NLT "Live wisely among those who are not believers and make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone."

The Apostle Paul picks up this whole discussion of neighboring because Jesus specifically called him to be the kind of neighbor that crosses racial and cultural barriers to bring the gospel of Jesus to non-Jews, to Gentiles. In this calling Paul uses neighboring techniques that are very different from Jewish practices. Paul engages people in the "marketplace."

The marketplace was the ancient day mall, the third place. It's what Starbucks built their business on. Howard Schultze came up with this concept that the home is first place, work is second, but people would look for a third place to hang out and just be social. He thought what better way to be social than talking over a cup of coffee.

Starbucks website: "Welcome to Starbucks A safe and welcoming public space is a shared community responsibility. Consistent with Our Mission and Values, we expect everyone **in our third-place community** to treat others with respect and dignity, free of bias and discrimination. Behaviors that make anyone feel unwelcome or unsafe have no place on our store premises."

Paul knew this would work in the first century! If you've ever been to a middle eastern country and seen the International marketplace, you'll experience exactly what Paul was telling the churches back in that day.

How do we know Paul meant this "opportunity" to be used in the context of neighboring?

This word Paul uses for “redeeming” time or “making the most” out of an opportunity for example. Paul used common greek words that were pulled right from his culture and time, and he then applied those words to illustrate godly principles.

Paul uses the word redeem ἐξαγοραζόμενοι. We see the word redeem and we hear “Christ’s redemption” or today’s understanding, turning in a glass bottle for its “redemption” value of .05 cents. But **in Paul’s day this word was a shopping term!** That’s right, a get-down-here in the open-air market and snag yourself a deal! So the word in Paul’s day carried the idea “buying up the opportunity.”

Walking the ancient ruins of Ephesus or Corinth, you’ll find these enormous open-air malls, where hundreds of vendors would setup shop and pitch their products or services.

Paul was a small business own as a side-gig for support but also for his own version of being a good neighbor. Paul didn’t technically have a “home” neighborhood. He traveled constantly. He would live with friends, renting a room for a few months or up to three years. The marketplace **was** Paul’s neighborhood!

Of course, the timing needs to be right! Of course, the gospel might not be the first thing that comes out of our mouths.

I need to be careful here. I have seen people use tactics and phrases that I would not use, but God has used them anyways. Jesus loves you! The end is near! Repent or burn! I’ve seen the gospel presented with clarity and passion and people have mocked, but some were moved to give their lives to Jesus and believe!

I am not the guy to walk up to a stranger and say, “Hi, my name is Glenn, I was lost but now I’m found. Repent and be baptized.”

I would have loved to watch the Apostle Paul talk to his fellow small business neighbors while out in the open-air marketplace. There, while mending tents, he would share the gospel with people and many of them came to Christ, later becoming leaders in the local church!

Some just bring up Jesus immediately, others wait to find out what God has already been up to in someone's life before jumping into a specific spiritual conversation. I am not a presentation or a script kind of person when it comes to sharing my faith. I have a story to tell, but I don't lead with that. I listen.

Jesus shared a critical comparison to how he goes about loving his neighbor verses how the Slanderer and liar seeks to destroy any chance of someone coming to truth and repairing the breach between them and God. **Jesus said, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."**

Here's why sharing the gospel (good news) is nothing like pitching a sale on a cold call.

We have believed that sharing our faith, talking about what God has done in our life is like forcing folks to use our brand of shampoo or toothpaste. I have to quit thinking I am pushing a religion and just be a eyewitness to my own story, and my own current experience with Jesus. If I don't have a current, fresh experience with Jesus, it will be difficult to be authentic about my faith.

If I have to pull stories from years gone by and not something current and relevant and recent, I am not walking in and with the Spirit.

Back to Paul's methodology. He tells the church, "Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone."

One commentator hints that **Paul is telling the church to be artful, skillful, even witty in the way they talk to those outside the church.** Using the phrase "**always be in grace, seasoned with salt**" not dull or flat but is interesting and well-chosen words.

The Greeks used the phrase "seasoned with salt" to mean witty, even humorous, bantering in their conversation.

So that you would know (eidó: **be aware**) of how to apokrinomai: **to judge, decide** or answer *hékastos* (from *hekas*, "separate")
- *each (individual) unit viewed distinctly.*

Plainspeak- having normal conversations with people. Talking to different people according to their own interests and relationship to you.

When I talk to some of you I'm sensitive to the fact that you're a sports, a motorcycle, a coffee or foodie person and not just prattle on about Apple's new M2 chip with its 12-core GPU performance improvements.

This takes practice and some learning to work at this skill to not sound churchy when talking to someone who knows little or nothing of Jesus.

I've talked about working with [social workers](#) (Link to 1.3k acronyms used in social work) **who flip into their natural "shoptalk" of acronyms and insider phrases.**, "well I see that he's gonna need a GAL because of his BPD, have you checked his SSI when finished his ACT."

God help us to be flavorful, seasoned, humorous or sensitive with the way we speak! If we're not careful we'll bring our familiar church conversation to a neighbor that has no idea of what we're talking about.

Years ago, you could drop church lingo into conversations and folks would have some idea of what you're talking about. But now, churchy talk is as helpful as giving a teenager a rotary dial phone or a standard clock and asking them to show you how to use it.

This week's focus on Love being timely is directly because of Paul's use of the word "opportunity" and his encouragement to use gracious and attractive words when talking with unbelievers.

I am also reminded that Love takes time. To a child, LOVE is spelled T.I.M.E.

John Ortberg has coined the phrase "hurry sickness." As he says, "Love and hurry are fundamentally incompatible. **Love always takes time, and time is the one thing hurried people don't have.**"

The third letter, "T" in G.R.I.T. stands for TIMELY.

Love that is true is TIMELY.

Takeaway: Love is seeing and seizing opportunities, understanding that interruptions and inconveniences are often God-moments. And that being gracious and witty with our words are helpful in sharing our faith or just helping people take that next step in their own faith journey.

Story: Conversations in neighborhood - Connecting with one of my oldest friendships relatives - Paula, Wendy's Mother.

I have several ongoing conversations with about 20 neighbors. Checking in with Christine, Mario, Chuck or one of my newest connections with Dean and Kat. But the one with Paula really got me.

I've been friends with Frank, a dear friend from 2nd grade at Grant Elementary in Long Beach. I was a groomsman when he married Wendy over forty years ago. We've kept in touch over the years. When Robin and I moved back into Santa Ana a few years back we decided to get involved with our neighborhood because it is very 1950's in it's vibe. Wilshire Square has a volunteer community committee that hosts several events every year. We've got a Christmas parade, a summer concert on one of our streets, a movie night even a coordinated "who's giving out candy" Halloween plan.

One of the original organizers that used to run the committee and is still a little involved, especially with A LOT of opinions on the Nextdoor App, is Paula. After three years of living in Wilshire Square, I had been talking to Frank when he asked live now. I told him, Santa Ana. He said, Santa Ana? That's interesting, Wendy's mom lives In Santa Ana. She lived on a street that is one street over from us, within walking distance!

Then one day, just completely random, I get a DM (direct message) on the Nextdoor app from Paula, the former president of the Wilshire Square Committee. She wrote, "Are you the friend of my daughter's husband, Frank?" I replied, "Yes, and I just live down the street from you."

Everyday that I take my neighborhood walk I go down her street and wave as she sits in her living room window and just looks out at the world every morning.

Paula needs Jesus and I have been able to talk with her several times. I brought some fruits and vegetables over and brought some flowers to her last Valentine's Day. It just blows my mind how God connects people in the most unusual way. Who would ever believe that we would move into the neighborhood of the mother-in-law to one of my oldest and dearest friends? And have an opportunity to know her, talk with her and love her. This is NOT coincidence, its providential opportunity to show Jesus to Paula even in her elderly years.

NOTES

The Art of Neighboring, Dave Runyon and Jay Pathak

Following are three life-balancing principles that will help you do just that: (1) make the main thing the main thing, (2) eliminate time stealers, and (3) be interruptible.

The idea of being **interruptible** is being **willing to be inconvenienced**. It means developing a mind-set that accepts the interruptions of others.

Do I live at a pace that allows me to be available to those around me? And if not, are all of the things I'm doing more important than taking the Great Commandment literally?

Scriptures

Colossians 4:5-6 NLT

"Live wisely among those who are not believers and **make the most of every opportunity**. Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone."

Ephesians 5:15-17 NLT

"So be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise. **Make the most of every opportunity** in these evil days. Don't act thoughtlessly but understand what the Lord wants you to do."

1 Corinthians 16:9 NLT

"There is a wide-open door for a great work here, although many oppose me."

John 10:10 NLT

"The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to **give them** a rich and satisfying life."

John 10:10 ESV

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came **that they may have life** and have it abundantly."

Questions

- Q: How do you feel about taking advantage of a sale or snagging a discount?
- Q: What do you think about Starbucks being "third place"?
- Q: What "place" do you think the church comes in today?
- Q: On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being "comfortable" and 10 being "uncomfortable" how do you feel about having a spiritual conversation with an unbeliever?
- Q: Have you shared your faith with a co-worker, friend, or neighbor? How did it go?
- Q: Have you experienced any kind of evangelism training? Did it help?
- Q: What do you think about Paul's challenge to be witty or authentic in our speech with unbelievers?

COMMENTARY REFERENCES

Strong's Concordance

they may have - echōsin, **ἔχω**; future **ἔξω**; imperfect **εἶχον** (**1 person plural** **είχαμεν**, **2 John 1:5** T Tr WH)

Opportunity 1805 eksagorázō (from **1537** /ek, "completely out from" which intensifies **59** /agorázō, "buy-up at the marketplace") – properly, **take full advantage of, seizing a buying-opportunity, i.e. making the most of the present opportunity** (recognizing its future gain). Note the prefix (ek) which lends the meaning, "out and out," "fully" (WS, 917.)

Word Studies in the New Testament

Colossians 4:5 (WSNT): Redeeming the time (τὸν καιρὸν ἐξαγοραζόμενοι). Compare Eph. 5:16, and Dan. 2:8, Sept. The word is used in the New Testament only by Paul, Gal. 3:13; 4:5; Eph. 5:16. The compounded preposition ἐξ has the meaning out of, as Gal. 3:13, "Christ redeemed us out of the curse," etc., and out and out, fully. So here and Eph. 5:16, buy up. Rev., in margin, buying up the opportunity. The favorable opportunity becomes ours at the price of duty

Expositor's Greek Testament

Colossians 4:5. Cf. Ephesians 5:15. An exhortation to wise conduct in relation to non-Christians.—τοῖς ἔξω: those outside the Church; the reference is suggested by the mention of θύραν τ. λόγου. They must be wise in their relations with them so as not to give them an unfavorable impression of the Gospel.—τὸν καιρὸν ἐξαγοραζόμενοι: "making your market fully from the occasion" (Ramsay, St. Paul the Traveller, p. 149). They are to seize the fitting opportunity when it occurs to do good to "those without," and thus promote the spread of the Gospel.

The New Bible Commentary

Colossians 4:5-6 (NBC): 5-6 Turning to general principles of Christian conduct, Paul urges his readers to behave wisely towards non-Christians. Here wisdom, which has to do with a knowledge of God's will (1:9) and walking worthily of the Lord (1:10), is essentially practical and realistic. So, they are to be tactful yet bold in their Christian witness as they make the most of every opportunity. **Make the most (lit. 'buy up') suggests an intensive activity, a buying which exhausts the possibilities available because they recognize that their time is limited.** 6 As those who are to behave wisely towards outsiders, they are to let their words be both gracious and wise just as Paul desires for his own speech. **They are receiving God's grace: let that grace be evident in the words they speak. Seasoned with salt meant 'witty' in pagan usage but here suggests language that is not dull or flat but is interesting and well chosen** (the rabbis sometimes used 'salt' to mean 'wisdom'). Christians need to respond with the right word to those who ask questions, perhaps in connection with their beliefs and behavior. The response should be appropriate (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15): 'every one is to be treated as an end in himself and not subjected to a stock harangue' (G. B. Caird).

The church at Colosse

Colosse was a small, relatively unimportant city in Roman times (a 'small town' according to the contemporary writer, Strabo) although it had a thriving wool industry in the fifth and fourth centuries bc. It was situated in the Lycus valley about 100 miles (160 km) east of Ephesus and, together with Laodicea and Hierapolis, belonged to the Roman province of Asia.

The Christian community at Colosse came into existence during a period of vigorous evangelism, linked with Paul's ministry at Ephesus (ad 52-55), recorded in Acts 19. Paul was helped by several co-workers who planted a number of churches in the province of Asia. Among these were the congregations of Colosse, Laodicea and Hierapolis, which were the fruit of Epaphras's evangelistic efforts (1:7; 4:12-13). Epaphras, a native of Colosse (4:12), who may have become a Christian during a visit to Ephesus, was 'a faithful minister of Christ' and as Paul's representative (1:7) he had taught the Colossians the truth of the gospel. Paul often refers to the non-Christian past of the readers which suggests that most of them were Gentile converts. They had once been utterly out of harmony with God, enmeshed in idolatry and slavery to sin, being hostile to God in mind and godless in their actions (1:21; cf. vs 12, 27). They had been dead because of their sins and 'the uncircumcision of ... [their] flesh'—a statement which indicates they were both heathen and godless (2:13).

John 10:7-10 (NBC): 7-10 The imagery now changes, with Jesus himself seen as the gate. He claimed exclusive right to grant entry. V 8 has presented difficulties if it is supposed that none who came before Jesus were anything other than thieves and robbers, which clearly would make nonsense of the OT. Some mss omit the words before me, but it most likely that they are original. **The most probable meaning is that any who came before Jesus and claimed to be the only way in were false; a reference to the many false Messiahs with whom the history of the period abounded.** Indeed the previous chapter shows how disastrous were the claims of the Pharisees. In v 9 Jesus' own claim is repeated in a more extended form. He now promises both salvation and sustenance.

[Glenn: Clearly the reference to "the thief" is in regard to the chief thief, supplanter, slanderer and liar, but It is also a clear message to the religious leaders who were present when Jesus told this story. Their message of access to God by keeping the law was not only a lie, but it would result in death! Other commentators are confident that Jesus was referring to failed attempts to get to God via the law. Jesus confirmed there was no other way, except through him as the messiah.]

[Glenn: Jesus' illustration about being a good shepherd. **John 10:7-8 NLT** "so he explained it to them: "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. **All who came before me were thieves and robbers.** But the true sheep did not listen to **them.**"

Who are "they" or "them" Jesus is referring to?

1. It's the people of Israel, God's chosen.
2. It's also the non-Jews, the gentiles who will be welcomed and will soon come to a saving knowledge of the Christ. **"I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd."** John 10:16 NLT. **See Isaiah 56:8 "The Lord God, who gathers the**

outcasts of Israel, declares, "I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered."

Faithlife Study Bible

Luke 10:33 (FSB): Samaritans

The people of Samaria were of mixed Israelite and foreign descent, so the Jewish people did not accept them as part of the Jewish community (see note on John 4:9). The hostilities between Jews and Samaritans dated all the way back to the late sixth century bc. The Samaritans worshiped Yahweh and used a version of the Pentateuch as their Scripture, but they worshipped on Mount Gerizim, not in Jerusalem. Thus, the Samaritans were despised by Jews for both ethnic and religious reasons; there was mutual hatred by the Samaritans toward Jews.

Summary of Messages - Love's True Grit:

- **True Love is Genuine:** Love doesn't look for loopholes.
- **True Love is Refining:** Seeing people as God sees them.
- **True Love is Intentional:** specific love can be divinely directed
- **True Love is timely:** It is a choice to seize the opportunity.