

COLOSSIANS

a life worth living

How Can I Make the Most of Every Opportunity to Influence Others for Good/God?

Col. 4:2-6; 1 Pet. 3:15-16

Bob Stone

- I. **CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR INFLUENCE** in the church gathered/scattered.
- A. **A COMMITMENT TO PRAYER**—Col. 4:2-4. What motivates us? Why would Paul need to urge us to do something that's such a privilege? The kinds of prayer:
- Pray while being watchful/thankful—v. 2, e.g., observe needs/be thankful.
 - Pray for open doors—v. 3a, e.g., have greater opportunities to influence/share.
 - Pray Jesus is the focus of our life/testimony—v. 3b, e.g., center of our sharing.
 - Pray our limitations will not get in the way—v. 3c, e.g., our stuff's not the focus.
 - Pray our message is clear, as it should be—v. 4, e.g., precise, meaningful.
- What's going to impact the person who prays in 4:2-4? (Influence!) Paul also asks for:
- B. **A COMMITMENT TO ACT WISELY.** v. 5—*“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.”* Prayer and action are both needed. Here are three specific ways we influence others:
1. **Wise and Consistent in our Actions**—v. 5a. It's a wise process, not an event.
 2. **Wise in our Investments**—v. 5b. (Snap up every opportunity, but invest wisely.)
 3. **Wisdom and Meaning in our Life.** (A meaningful life that shows/works for us.)
- C. **A COMMITMENT TO CONVERSE WISELY.** v. 6—*“Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone,”* There are two elements - we're to be **full of grace** (grace-filled speech/gracious/nice) and **seasoned with salt.** (Salt is purifying; a preservative; adds flavor to our talk and creates thirst, i.e., talk that is nice, gracious, purifying, wise, flavorful. (See top 10 ways.) These are the ingredients/guidelines for wise conversations:
1. **Approach with the right attitude, e.g., sincere (unmasked)**—1 Peter 3:15-16.
 2. **Whenever possible, our conversation should be seasoned with the salt of wit and tasteful humor, too!** Mark 10:25; Matt. 6:27; Luke 9:60; Prov. 15:13
 3. **Encourage whenever possible**—Luke 10:28; Mark 12:34; Matt. 15:28.
 4. **Ask wise questions, i.e., draw out others' viewpoints**—Luke 10:26.
 5. **Keep real love present in every conversation**—1 Cor. 13:1-13; Eph. 4:15.
 6. **Respond with grace to questions/challenges during our interaction**—Col. 4:6.
 7. **Keep all of our conversations balanced with truth** (not a club)—John 4:17-18.
 8. **Be alert to the Holy Spirit's involvement** (prods/insights)—John 4:17-18.

II. CREATING A HEALTHY RECIPE FOR GOSPEL GRANOLA

- A. **Every “Cook” Needs to Make Four Commitments - to pray, to act wisely, to converse wisely and to have a grasp of the gospel**—Rom. 3:23; 6:23; 10:9-10; John 3:16; 1 John 1:9; Rev. 3:20.
- B. **Welcome to Cooking with Chef Bobby Fish Fillet.** The recipe for **Gospel Granola**:
1. We always start with **prayer**. Pray that every meal (conversation) is suited for our guests. (That we won't kill them—destroy future opportunities to share.)
 2. The main ingredient in Gospel Granola is oats—**the gospel** (the Good News).
 3. In the mix should be some **raisins and dried or fresh fruit—the right attitudes**, such as sincerity and genuine interest in the person.
 4. We should also add **a variety of nuts** to the recipe, which would be like adding **wit and humor** into our conversation (a few walnuts, cashews, almonds, etc.).
 5. Next we sprinkle on some **coconut**; that's like adding **encouragement**.
 6. Then for special health reasons we might blend in some **flax seed** - that's like adding **wise questions** to our presentations, so we're not always talking, but we're also listening and asking appropriate questions.
 7. Next, let's drizzle on some **honey**, which represents **the love** that must be thoroughly mixed with the other ingredients in our presentation of the gospel.
 8. I like to sprinkle on a **seasoning like cinnamon**; it represents the **gracious words** that should be sprinkled in to spice up our conversation.
 9. Over all this we pour on **milk**, which certainly is like **the Scriptures** that should seep into and around every portion of our conversation. (Also customize some presentations, like adding something new or special, e.g., **apple cinnamon bread**. It has many of the same ingredients as the granola, but obviously in a different form.) Of course the gospel must be present as we creatively share.
 10. Finally, when we share the Good News with others, we should be open to the special and **creative promptings of the Spirit of God** to give us a word of wisdom, or to lead us to another person God might sovereignly bring into our life. God mixes up our presentations and methods depending on the situation.

III. LET'S TAKE AN INVENTORY OF OUR ACTIONS AND OURSELVES from 1 Pet. 3:15-16.

- A. **The Prerequisites:** Is Jesus Lord? Jesus must be Lord if we intend to be used by God. We must be prepared to answer questions and have an evident hope—v. 15.
- B. **Interior Qualities Needed for authentic witness:** gentleness, respect and a clear conscience. 1 Peter also reminds us we have to be prepared for malicious talk, rejection and slander—vv. 15b-16. On the other hand, some will respond positively. They will be ashamed when they see our good actions/behavior.
- C. **The Consequences:** v. 6—“...so that you may know how to answer everyone.”

IV. Principles - Applications - Questions—Colossians 4.

How can we apply this passage even more specifically? (What are the principles, applications questions that tie this passage together?)

A. Principle: Doors are opened through prayer. I should ask myself:

1. Am I praying specifically for open doors? Where? With whom? When?
2. If the church was filled with my converted friends, acquaintances, family, neighbors, enemies, fellow students and workers, what would it look like? How might I pray for that?

B. Principle: How we act opens doors of opportunity. I should ask:

1. What actions have I taken that have opened the door to share with others?
2. What unwise actions have I taken, or seen others take that have closed the door of opportunity?
3. Besides prayer, what door-opening actions do I think I need to take now?
4. In the church gatherings: What action am I going to take to open the door for pre-Christians and seekers? How's my hospitality? (This is a key element in outreach—1 Pet. 4:9; Rom. 12:13.)
5. Also, in the church gatherings: How does my conversation/greeting open or close the door to newcomers in the church gatherings I attend?

C. Principle: Confinement or opposition does not need to limit my proclamation, e.g., Paul in prison and in chains. A person's chains/impairments/restrictions can be a megaphone in the life of a dedicated servant. I should ask myself:

1. What makes it difficult for me to share Christ with others?
2. What excuses am I going to eliminate for my lack of sharing Christ with others?
3. What weakness and/or circumstance have taken place in my life that has opened the door to share with others?

D. Principle: When the doors open, we need to be prepared to proclaim our message clearly and specifically. I should ask myself:

1. Do I have a number of verses memorized that present what it means to be a Christ follower?
2. Do I have a formal presentation of the Good News that I have memorized, or do I use a different approach each time? What are the pros/cons of a presentation prepared, or one that is spontaneous?
3. What approach do I use most of the time when I share Christ?
4. After reading 1 Peter 3:15-16, am I ready to give an answer for the hope that lies within me?
5. What kinds of questions from pre-Christians do I feel nervous about or unprepared to answer?
6. In the place where I have the greatest potential for influence, which of the following effects of salt do I want to see in my testimony and actions: to purify, preserve, flavor, or create a thirst? Explain.

E. Principle: Wise Conversations About Jesus Are Consistently Filled With Similar Ingredients - prayer, the gospel, encouragement, sincerity, love, truth, good questions, being alert to the Holy Spirit's involvement and a wise and selective use of salt and wit. I should ask myself:

1. Which of these ingredients do I find most effective in wise conversations about Jesus?
2. Which of them am I desirous to add to my conversation and presentations? Why?
3. How has encouragement and gracious speech affected my opportunity to share the gospel?
4. What are the marks of sincerity in an individual? How would I define sincerity? How does the word unmasked help to define what sincerity means?
5. How should the Scripture be worked into a presentation? What Scriptures do I recommend a person memorize?
6. If the Holy Spirit has ever prompted me to share Christ with another person, what were the results? How will I pray for His help in the future?
7. How will I pray for my/our church's outreach to our cities?

V. "A Seeker's Top Ten list" has been stated or implied by our friends:

A. **If we put grace and salt together into an expanded paraphrase, it would mean:**
"Let your conversation act as a purifying influence, be gracious and filled with wisdom for all who hear it."

B. Now to prove the point about how effective this combination of grace and purity can be, here are some examples of what seekers have said about what is wise and salty. Why do I think the items on this list are true or not true? Do I disagree with any of them?

- **10.** I don't care how much you know until I know how much you care.
- **9.** Have compassion for me. Don't condemn me because my life's a mess.
- **8.** Ask permission to tell me about God; don't just push Him on me. Talk with me, not at me. Listen to me. Find out about my world before you expect me to be interested in yours.
- **7.** Use words I can understand.
- **6.** Have a sense of humor. I want to know following Jesus can be enjoyed, not endured.
- **5.** If you tell me about your church, make sure you attend one where people love God and each other. Remember, chances are I've been burned or bored in church situations in the past.
- **4.** Don't just tell me about your faith; show me your faith; actions (character) speak louder than words.
- **3.** Take your time. Don't tell me everything at once. Give me time to think and process.
- **2.** Tell me how following Jesus can make a difference in my daily life, not just on Sunday. If I'm going to follow Jesus, I want it to work in real life.
- **1.** Make Jesus real to me; show me Jesus and how to know Him, and chances are I'll want to know Him, too.

In other words, if you're a follower after Jesus: *"Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone"*
—v. 6.

Gospel Granola

In order to make a healthy meal, this recipe needs to be preceded with prayer.

Ingredients

The main ingredient must be the **oats** of the gospel. Other elements include **right attitudes**, such as sincerity and genuine interest in others; **wit and humor; encouragement; wise questions and listening; love; gracious words; the Scriptures** and openness to **the creative promptings of the Spirit of God**.

Directions

We always start with **prayer**, and then we pour in the main ingredient, the **oats** of the gospel (the **Good News**). Next, for an effective presentation, we mix in some **raisins and dried or fresh fruit**. These represent **the right attitudes such as sincerity and genuine interest** in the person we're talking to. We should also add a **variety of nuts** to the recipe, e.g., **walnuts, cashews, almonds**, etc. This is like adding **wit and humor** to our conversations. Next we sprinkle on some **coconut**. That's like adding **encouragement** whenever possible and appropriate. Then for special health reasons, we may **blend in some flax seed**. That's like adding **wise questions** to our presentations, so that we're not always talking, but we're also **listening** and asking appropriate **questions**. Next we drizzle on and mix in some **honey**. That represents the **love** that must be thoroughly mixed with the other ingredients in our presentation of the gospel. I also like to sprinkle on a spice like **cinnamon**. It represents the **gracious words** that should be sprinkled in to spice up our conversation. Over all of this we pour on **milk**. The milk is like the **Scriptures** that should seep into and around every portion of our conversation. Finally, when we share the good news (our recipe) with others, we should be open to the **special and creative promptings of the Spirit** of God to give us a word of wisdom or lead us to another person God might sovereignly bring into our life. God mixes up our presentations and methods, depending on the situation or the nutritional needs of our guests.

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