

## Sent Among Our Networks Colossians 4:2-6

We usually work through books of the Bible, but in between book studies, we often hit some important subjects, including aspects of our global mission.... We have a **PEACE** plan, which is this.... For the next few weeks we are focusing on evangelism....

Everyone is evangelizing for something: aroma therapy, kale smoothies, La Croixs, life-changing skin care, Downton Abbey, Busch Gardens, CrossFit, The Greatest Showman Soundtrack, Alexander Hamilton, Lebron for MVP, & how to have a pollen-free life. The gospel (the evangel) is too good, and too important, to keep to ourselves!

I pray that these sermons will reawaken us to the call to reach outsiders, and will provide some practical instruction on how to do it. Today will be very practical, from one of the most encouraging/positive texts on *everyday evangelism* (Col 4:2-6).

Over 20 years ago, John Piper preached on this text at his church. He said:

**From time to time in the life of the church there needs to be a wake up call to some simple and central and basic things. One of these is: Christianity is a converting religion. It is evangelistic. It is persuasive and expansive and missionary. It is not coercive. It does not use the sword, manipulation, or brainwashing. But it does proclaim, and persuade and plead and pray.... When we lose a passion to see people won over to Jesus, we lose Jesus.**

**Christianity is a soul-winning, out-reaching, mind-persuading, heart-entreating, rescuing, missionary faith, or it is not true Christianity. We need to be reminded of this, because it is almost incredible how listless we can become while calling ourselves Christians. Little by little our whole orientation can become inward.... We just go about our in-house religious business like a medical clinic that sees fewer and fewer patients and has more and more staff meetings, until there is nothing left but a smooth running program for the doctors and nurses and their families. That is what happens to many churches.**

We need to hear this.

### **Burden**

Last week I had the privilege of speaking for one of our plants in Baltimore, Redemption City.

- One thing I miss about the early days of planting is how everyone is thinking about **outreach**. It's what you're there to do – **reach the city**.
- But slowly, gradually, if the church grows, **it's easy to turn inward as a church**.
- That's happened to us. It's not that we're doing things we shouldn't be doing – we need to shepherd people. But **we must continue to keep our eyes outward** – on the people who are far from God. Paul calls them “**outsiders**” in today's text.
- There are thousands in the Triangle who don't know Jesus, and there are a people moving in constantly

## What Evangelism Is Not (ht: Green)

- It's not filling up a room.
- It's not sheep shuffling.
- It's not an occasional raid by a visiting celebrity.
- It's not just public preaching.
- It's not optional, though it doesn't have to be individualistic. You can do with your brothers and sisters.

## Network Card

Notice this card on your seat ([show picture](#)). Here are five networks that most of us have:  
**Vocational, Familial, Geographical, Commercial, & Recreational/Relational.**

God has placed in you in time and history; he is sovereign over the places in which we live (Acts 17:26).

I want to encourage you to think about the people in your networks, how you can

- (1) pray for them,
- (2) invite them (we have new inviter cards),
- (3) give books to them,
- (4) serve them, and
- (5) share the gospel with them.

There are various kinds of evangelism, such as **event evangelism** and **"cold call"** evangelism. The Lord does save people through these methods, but I want us to think about network evangelism today, **not only because it's a good method for today, but also because it's actually how the gospel exploded in the early days of Christianity.**

Insert *Cities of God*, Professor Rodney Stark, a social sciences professor at Baylor writes about **how Christianity became an urban movement and conquered Rome**. He explains the following about the early converts to Christ:

**Social networks are the basic mechanism through which conversion takes place.... Most conversions are not produced by professional missionaries conveying a new message, but by rank-and-file members who share their faith with their friends and relatives.... The principle that conversions spread through social networks is quite consistent with the fact that the earliest followers of Jesus shared many family ties and long-standing associations.... Although the very first Christian converts in the West may have been by full-time missionaries, the conversion process soon became self-sustaining as new converts accepted the obligation to spread their faith and did so by missionizing their immediate circle of intimates.**

Let's accept responsibility to minister to those in our networks.

## Colossians 4

In Col. 4:2-6, **Paul emphasizes the Christian's witness in the world.**

- He speaks of **his witness**, and the **Colossian believers' witness**. That is; **ordinary Christians on mission.**
- Evangelism is not for elite, Special Forces Christians. |

- This is probably a small house church in the Lycus Valley (Modern day Turkey). [Philem 1:1-2] Paul writes to them around AD 62.
- It's a beautiful Christ-exalting letter. In 4:2ff, he's giving some final instructions.

In Co. 1, Paul stated that the gospel is "bearing fruit in all the world."

- The gospel was at work in the world, as believers were making it known.

You can see the evangelistic emphasis in these verses:

- 4:3-4 – "Evangelistic praying"
- 4:5 - Walk wisely among "outsiders."
  - **Outsiders:** those outside the Christian faith, outside the Christian community.
  - **Mark 4:11; 1 Cor 5:12-13; 1 Thess 4:12; 1 Tim 3:7**
- 4:6 - Talk to outsiders in a particular way.

So there are three challenges, I want to give you, in the form of an acronym: NET.

**N** – Never stop praying (4:2-4)

**E** – Exercise your faith wisely (4:5)

**T** – Talk graciously, winsomely, and appropriately (4:6)

The text highlights **our prayer life & our public life.**

- Many Xians have a great private, prayer life, but not much of a public witness.
  - God hasn't called us to be monks, but missionaries.
- Other Xians are among people a lot, but they actually don't influence those around them; some actually become more like them – or, they may be a decent witnesses, but they don't have much of a prayer life.
- We need both – faithful and fruitful **prayer life and public life.**

**N – Never Stop Praying (4:2-4)**

#### **A. Informed Prayer (4:2)**

"**Continue steadfastly**" – Be persistent in prayer. Be devoted to prayer.

"**Pray until you've prayed.**"

- Re. evangelism, we must pray **because only God can save.**
- We are asking for God to give people spiritual life; so we **must use spiritual weapons!**

"**Being watchful**" – **Be alert. Stay awake. Be aware of spiritual warfare; be aware of the mission.**

- Don't pray with your head in the sand, but know what's going on.
- Your prayers should **be in tune with the times.**
- Practiced informed prayer, **know what's going on missionally.**

"**with thanksgiving**" – It should be the consistent pattern of our life (**Col 3:17; 2:7**)

- We should thank God for bringing us from darkness to light (**1:11-14**)

- We should thank God for converting others through the witness of faithful saints. (1:3-5)
- We should thank God for answered prayer.

**C.S. Lewis:** “I have two lists of names in my prayers, those for whose conversions I pray and those for whose conversions *I give thanks*. The little trickle of transferences from List A to List B is a great comfort.”

Would you pray that God would use you to see just one person out of your networks taken from list A to list B?

Here a testimony from my friend, Pastor Harvey (*Friend of Sinners*)

About 5 years ago, my family moved into the house where we are currently living. Before we moved in, I spent time prayer-walking our neighborhood, asking God to let us find a house in this neighborhood that will have neighbors he is calling into His Kingdom....

Within a couple of months, a woman named Tracy moved in next door. We immediately began praying for her. The following few months, we had many interactions with her in the yard...

One mid December, while she was away at work, Tracy’s home was broken into and burglarized. She was very distraught and Rachael went over to her house. After listening and sitting with her for a while, Rachael asked Tracy if she could pray for her. She said, “Yes,” and Rachael prayed. This one act of praying changed the dynamics of the relationship they would have in the future....

After a dozen or so gospel conversations, Tracy started coming to church with us. Four years of praying and talking to her about the gospel were beginning to have an effect. The relationship my wife built with Tracy began to flourish and it came to a point where it was natural for her to attend church with us, and she even felt comfortable to sit with us almost every week. I can thankfully say that in the last few months she's been converted to Christ, and she wants to now get baptized in light of her commitment to Jesus. *What Tracy didn't know is that before she moved in we prayed for her, we prayed for her regularly during the course of those four years, and we are still praying for her now.*

Continue steadfastly in prayer.

### **B. Intercessory Prayer (4:3)**

Paul asks for the church to pray for him now (cf., Eph 6:18-20)

- Now, **he has never met the Colossians believers.**
- Yet, he asks for believers to pray for **gospel advance** in hard place. We can do the same.

Pray for **an open door for the word**

- The “word” is personified here. Paul wants the word to enter the hearts and minds of individuals and communities.

- Paul uses this expression elsewhere when describing **situations in which his witness was particularly effective; that is, God was at work:**
  - After the first missionary journey, Paul gave a report to the church in Antioch: “And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.” (**Acts 14:27**)
  - “But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, <sup>9</sup> for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.” (**1 Cor 16:8b-9**)
  - When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, <sup>13</sup> my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. (**2 Cor 2:12**)
- **There are places where the doors are bolted shut, so to speak; they are countries that are bolted shut; there are hearts that are bolted shut – pray for an open door!**
- Pray for gospel opportunities.

Pray for **Christ** to be proclaimed **clearly**

- The message of the word focuses on **Christ**.
  - This mystery – this story of the Bible – climaxes in Christ.
  - He’s asking **that he may proclaim the whole story.**
  - **Colossians 1:28-29** - Christ is the subject and power... Satan isn’t bothered by a moral improvement plan; what he doesn’t want is Christ being preached.
- Paul is in prison for preaching this Christ, “**chains**”
  - The most likely place being Rome, **Acts 28**. The Lord gave him an open door in prison.
  - **Phil 1:12-18** – Paul told the Philippians that helped to advance the gospel.
  - There will be sacrifice involved.
- He asks for gospel **clarity** in preaching it
  - If Paul needed prayer for clarity, how much more do we!
  - In Eph 6:18-20, he requested prayer for boldness.
  - We need both: clarity and boldness.
  - **People may reject the gospel, but let’s make sure they know what they’re rejecting.**

**Pray for people in your networks.**

**Pray for your brothers and sisters who are seeking to make the gospel known.**

### **E – Exercise Your Faith Wisely (4:5)**

Do you know any **Outsiders**? There are a number of them in RDU:

- “Suburban Suzy”
- “Mobile Mitch”
- “College Collin”
- “Spiritual but not Religious Stanley Reynolds”
- “Nancy the None”

- “Agnostic Aaron”

We must not become a **holy huddle**, always speaking “the language of Zion” to insiders, but must maintain a concern for outsiders.

- We must remember that we were once them.

**And we must exercise wisdom.**

- Many calls to evangelism ignore the call to be wise.
- **You might think of this as “evangelistic skills” or “evangelistic sensibilities.”**

### **A. Wisdom Toward Outsiders**

- The **praise** of wisdom: “Whoever wins souls is wise” (Prov 11:30)
- The **picture** of wisdom: **Jesus**. Wisdom is embodied and exemplified in Christ. Walking in wisdom means walking like Jesus toward outsiders. He walked and talked with integrity (cf., put off/on Col 3:8-10; “walk worthy of your calling”)
- The **path** of wisdom: Thessalonian pattern. Paul is talking about how to live among outsiders to the church in Thessalonica and he says:

#### **1 Thess 4:11-12**

... aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before *outsiders* and be dependent on no one.

So here, wisdom toward outsiders involves **working hard and not meddling**.

- **To be a good witness at work, you need to first be a good employee.**
- **Walking in wisdom means not bringing reproach on the name of Christ by the way you live.**
- **Don’t be a stumbling block, but be an effective witness by how you live.**

### **B. The Best Use of Your Time**

- The verb literally means “**buying up**” or “**buying out**” – “**snap up every opportunity like it’s a bargain**.”
- It’s a phrase taken from the marketplace.
- The Lord gives us certain golden opportunities to bear witness. Take advantage of them!
- Perhaps you will have opportunity to **invite someone to dinner, to bless them in a tangible way; to give a book to them. Be ready.**

**Be creative in creating opportunities with outsiders, exercise wisdom, and take advantage of opportunities. Let me share a few ideas:**

### **Easy Ways to be Missional**

1. **Eat with Non-Christians.**
2. **Be a Regular.**

3. **Hobby with Non-Christians.**
4. **Talk to Your Co-workers.**
5. **Volunteer with Non-Profits.**
6. **Participate in City Events.**
7. **Walk Your Neighborhood.**
8. **Start a Group/Event with your Neighbors.**

**T – Talk graciously, winsomely, and appropriately (4:6)**

**A. Graciously**

- We must avoid arrogance and harshness.
- We must speak about the gospel of grace with grace.
- **You don't want to win arguments, but lose people because of your attitude.**
- Have a heart for people; practice grace, don't just preach it.

**I love a minister whose face invites me to make him my friend ... on whose doorstep you read "Welcome," not "Beware of Dog." .... Give me the man around whom the children come.... An individual who doesn't have a friendly, cheerful manner about him had better be an undertaker, and bury the dead, for he will never succeed in influencing the living.... A man must have a great heart if he is to have a great congregation.... When a man has a large, loving heart, men go to him as ships to a haven.... Such a man is hearty in private as well as in public. (Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures*)**

**B. Winsomely**

- **"seasoned with salt"** – In contemporary idiom, to be "salty language" is nasty, talk, replete with profanities. **That's obviously not the point!**
- Salt was a preservative, and our talk should be clean. But that's not the idea here in Colossians, though that thought is conveyed elsewhere (no corrupt talk, Eph 4:29).
- Notice "seasoned with salt."
- **David Garland:** "Seasoned with salt" was used to refer to witty, amusing, clever, humorous speech. Their saltiness will prevent them from being ignored as irrelevant bores.... Godliness is not to be equated with stodginess. Flat formulas or lifeless platitudes do not capture the gospel's excitement. It must be made palatable with a savory combination of charm and wit."
- **Piper:** "I take this to mean that what we say about Christ and about the Christian life should be made as appetizing as possible. When food is not salted, its taste is *bland*. People don't want to eat it. It's unappetizing. Our speech is not supposed to be like that. This is one of the most refreshing things I have ever heard anyone say about personal evangelism."
- **Make your witness interesting, lively, and colorful.**
- **Avoid boring, tedious, monotonous conversation. Spurgeon was the great evangelist and people spoke regularly of his joy and sense of humor.**
- **Obviously you can overboard; the point is not to entertain.**
- **It's simply that believers and their life and conversation should be interesting and engaging.**

- **Use your personality. While some parts of our personality need to be sanctified, generally speaking, we should share the good news with our personality!**
  - You can be introverted and still interesting!
  - If you're witty, use your wit
  - If you're the extroverted social butterfly, let your excitement shine
  - If you practice hospitality well, let your kindness melt them.
  - Every person is interesting because they are unique!
  - Don't turn into an evangelism robot. But be yourself – but don't preach yourself.
- **Don't retreat from people, but engage them!**

**Dunn: “Here ... was a church not on the defensive against powerful forces organized against it, but expected to hold its own in the social setting of marketplace, baths, and meal table and to win attention by the attractiveness of its life and speech.”**

Kent Hughes tells of Becky Pippert, who wrote *Out of the Salt Shaker*. (Her husband served as UPI Bureau Chief in the Middle East). She wrote:

Recently at a party I was introduced by a very staid diplomat with: “This is Becky and she really believes. She's really devout and she's so interesting!” Wes and I have laughed many times over how people have introduced us here with great enthusiasm, fascination and respect. This comes out of the context of our efforts to genuinely get to know these people and their interests. We go to concerts together, see films together and out of scores of conversations, our Christian beliefs have emerged. We don't do this as a gimmick to slip in the gospel. We do it because we are genuinely interested in relating to non-believers and their worldviews.

### **How can you make your conversation with unbelievers attractive and appealing?**

- **You must first enjoy the gospel yourself!**
  - Some people are not interesting because they're not interested!
  - That's why it's essential to preach the gospel to yourself everyday.
- **You need to love people, and enjoy being present with them.**
- **You need to engage them with personality. Relax and lighten up.**
- **Ask sincere questions about their life – don't treat them as a project.**
  - **Ask questions – genuinely, not as a gimmick. Not as a salesman, working through your protocols.**
  - **Get to know their passions and ask questions.**
  - **Ask a thought-provoking questions.**
    - Dealing with a Doctor, “How do you give hope to patients?”
    - Dealing with someone who loves art, “How do you think we come to determine what is beautiful?” “I don't know, how do you think?”

May the Lord grant us Grace to be winsome.

### **C. Appropriately**

“each person” – Notice Paul recognizes that each person is different.



- **One canned presentation doesn't address each person's questions.**
- It's okay to have a presentation memorized, but **we need to do better than that.**
- Each person needs individual attention.
- This idea is conveyed in 1 **Peter 3:15** (next week's text).

### **Learning to Answer Well:**

- 1. Spend time with the questioners.** Some of you need to read less atheists and philosophers and talk more to your neighbors.
- 2. Be a good listener.**
  - Most people wanted to be heard and understood.
  - Most of pastoral counseling is just this. Sitting there while people talk!
  - Evangelism is a lot about listening, curiosity and being interested in the person.
  - **Often, Alvin Reid says, evangelism feels more like "counseling than debating."**
  - By listening, you will learn how to apply the gospel to them.
  - Jesus never used one canned presentation; he knew people and addressed them.
- 3. Know your faith.** Learn how to answer some of the basic questions that often arise.
- 4. Use natural language.**
- 5. Utilize testimony.**
- 6. Get help from other believers.**

D.A. Carson describes how a young college student named Peggy did this. Carson was pastoring in Vancouver, in a church that had about 120-150 college students. He describes the following (my transcription):

One of the most interesting members of the church was a young student named **Peggy**, at the University of British Columbia. She was vivacious, colorful, interesting, and enchanting in all kinds of ways. She couldn't rub two linear thoughts together, though. She would have made a horrible engineer. But fortunately, she was studying the arts. Due to her enthusiasm and personality, she was a bold witness for the gospel on campus.

She came to me one day and said, **"There's a chap on the football squad, named Fred, who wants to take me out and learn more about Jesus."**

I said, **"Uh huh."**

She said, **"Oh, I'm not interested romantically. I want to talk to him about Jesus."**

**"Uh huh."**

**"No really, I want to talk to him about Jesus."**

**"Fine you want to talk to him about Jesus. But watch yourself. You can be snookered. And after you've talked to him about Jesus, bring him to see me."**

And she did.

That Saturday night, I was working in my study, and at 10:30pm, I heard a knock on the door, and it was Peggy and Fred.

**"Hi, this is Fred. He wants to see you."**

It didn't look like he wanted to see me at all. But we went out to IHOP. We were there until 2am. I learned about Fred, and introduced him to the gospel. Next Saturday night, 10:30pm, it was Peggy and Fred. This time, he had a list of questions. I gave him things to

read. I tried to give him answers. I gave him things to look up. Then next Saturday night, he'd looked them all up; another list of questions. **For 3 ½ hours, Saturday night after Saturday night, for 13 weeks this went on.** (What this was doing to my sermons, I have no idea!)

After 13 weeks, he said, **“Alright, Don. I’ll become a Christian.”**

And he did. I baptized him. He’s now a deacon in his church.

- **Relationships. Time. Love.**
- **Evangelizing with other members of the community.**
- **Some are good at developing relationships; some are good at hospitality; some are good at answering questions.**
- **We have different gifts; We will do evangelism well when we do it together.**
- **Spurgeon said the church was the “garden of God,” with believers being like various flowers. Together we can display the glory of God and give forth a pleasing aroma to the world.**

## **7. Rely on the Spirit.**

- **Talk prayerfully.**
- **The Holy Spirit is the great evangelist.**

## **8. Have an unshakable confidence in the gospel.**

- **God saves people through the preaching of the gospel. Romans 1:16 really is true.**
- **Col 2:11-15.** God is at work when his word is communicated.
- **And one day we will see a people from every tribe and tongue, who will give testimony to the powerful working of God, who has made dead people live, who has made outsiders *insiders*.**
- **What a privilege to know this Christ, who canceled the record of debt that stood against us, and has forgiven all our trespasses; and what a privilege to make Him known to others.**