



# Conditions, Conversations and Conversions

Vienna Presbyterian Church  
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Colossians 4:2-6

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Over the years, I have been to my fair share of pastors' conferences—listened to many well-known Christian leaders offer their expertise, wisdom, and share many of their stories.



I'll tell you the story that always got to me was the speaker who said that he got on a plane to go to the next big event, sat next to a total stranger, and by the time the plane landed at their destination he had led that stranger to faith in Jesus Christ.

That has never happened to me! I have never done that! Ever!

Of course, I like to read when I fly, so I'm thinking that having a book in front of my face with my elbows up—you know, "don't bother me, I'm reading my book"—might have something to do with that.

And yet, I've had some conversations with strangers. Of course, these conversations always included the questions: "So, what do you do?" "And what do you do?" "*Oh, I'm a pastor....*" And there's a pause. I can see the guy going back in his mind thinking, "Oh, man, did I use a swear word?" *Like, we never swear, right? Like pastors aren't normal people! C'mon, I've hit my thumb with a hammer before.*

And yet—in all my conversations on a plane, or anywhere—I have never led a stranger to faith in Christ in just a few short hours! And, I would suspect that's true for most of you.

Some people have the gift of evangelism. It's a spiritual gift—some people just have a knack for it. And they're successful! Me? I don't have that gift—and actually, most people don't.

Paul was called and so-gifted to be an evangelist to the Gentiles. Many people came to Christ as a result of his ministry—including these believers at Colossae. Paul, in fact, founded this church!

Yet, while you and I might not be gifted in evangelism, every follower of Christ is called to be a WITNESS to their faith in the person and work of Jesus.

Notice, after writing about his outreach efforts—in jail, no less—Paul invites his readers to consider their

**“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” Colossians 4.5-6**

own place in spreading the good news of Jesus Christ and he tells them how: “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders (those without faith and who don't belong to a church); make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone” (vss. 5 and 6).

First, let me say this: Paul prays for and asks the Colossians to pray for “an open door.” You see, he understands that the door-opener is God! That no one—and I mean, no one, ever—comes to faith in Christ apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. Truth be told, that should give us a lot of

confidence when we DO share our faith—the end result is not up to us!

In John 16:8, Jesus said the Holy Spirit will “convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.” Further, in verse 13, “he, the Spirit of truth...will guide you into all truth.”

In John 6:44, Jesus said, “No one can come to me unless the Father draws him.” God, by his Holy Spirit, opens minds and hearts to truth. He’s the ultimate door-opener.

So, where do we come in? We can create the conditions for conversations that can potentially lead to conversions to Christ. We can partner with God to create the **conditions** that God can use to “open the door” a crack so that we can have certain **conversations** that God uses to “open the door” wider so that, over time, might fling “the door” wide open to faith (**conversion**), to new life and eternal life through Jesus Christ. So, again from verse 5: “be wise in the way you act toward outsiders....”

Paul wrote something similar in Ephesians 5:15: “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise, but as wise—making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”



St. Francis of Assisi, among many things, is famous for saying: “Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words.”

Now, I still think that at some point we have to use words, but his main point is well taken: “Preach the gospel of Christ—first—with your life and lifestyle—because chances are, if we don’t, we won’t get to the conversation stage. We have to create the conditions that make it possible for a conversation to happen.

“Be wise in the way you act toward” and in front of and with “outsiders.” Where? Everywhere!

I’ve always liked the blessing that Pastor Stan often uses at the end of a worship service. He tells me that he got it from Dick Halverson, who

**“Wherever you go, GOD is sending you. Wherever you are, God has put you there and has a purpose in you being there. Christ who indwells you has something HE wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in his grace and power.”**

once served as Chaplain to the United States Senate: “Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God has put you there and has a purpose in your being there. Christ who indwells you has something he wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in his grace and power.”

Among the many things that God would have us do is simply to “Preach the gospel of Christ” with our lives, by the way we live it “in his grace and power,” wherever we go, wherever we are, in whatever we do.

Interestingly, Dick Halverson also liked to tell the story of a time he was flying into National Airport (*don’t know if he had led anyone to Christ by that point—I doubt it, because in his story he said he was looking out the window—and hey, that’s what I do, too*). He said that he was looking for his

church (he served Fourth Presbyterian in Bethesda)—and try as he might, he couldn't spot it. When, it dawned on him: “Well, there's my church—in the offices on Capitol Hill, working at the White House, in the many homes down below raising children, driving the delivery van, in the classroom—teaching or learning, in the store—buying or selling, on the playground—playing a sport or watching a sport, or out there repairing what's broken or diseased....”

Vienna Presbyterian Church isn't just a beautiful building. You are Vienna Presbyterian Church—when you go out there. In all places, in all manner of tasks, before and with all sorts of people and in all sorts of situations—with our lives as they're lived, we can “Preach the gospel of Christ” and what a relationship with Jesus has done for our minds, our hearts, for our attitudes, for our actions and reactions.

Of course, the *flip side* is also true. Author Brennan Manning once wrote: “The greatest single cause of atheism in the world is Christians: who acknowledge Jesus with their lips, walk out of the door, and deny Him by their lifestyles. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable.”

**“It's not that Christians aren't where they should be, it's that they're NOT what they should be where they are.” Os Guinness**

Os Guinness, echoing that sentiment, wrote: “It's not that Christians aren't where they should be, it's that they're not what they should be

where they are.” So, Paul cautions: “Be wise, not unwise, in the way you act toward and before and with outsiders.” Why? Because they're watching and listening—and some

are looking for every excuse *not to believe* in Christ, while others are looking for any good reason *to believe!* *You don't want to be the reason some people don't believe.*

Paul adds: “Let your conversation be always full of grace....” Now, here, he’s not talking about “spiritual” conversations—just everyday speech in everyday situations with everyday people in the context of everyday life. He uses a phrase, in fact, that was common to even unbelieving Greeks, that literally means “sparkling!”

“Let your conversation be *sparkling* always.” Not meaning frivolous or light, cheesy or trite—but interesting, deep, engaging, enlivening, enlightening, different than the average bear....

He adds, “*seasoned with salt.*” Salt, in those days, served three purposes: salt purified, sometimes used as a healing agent, salt preserved foods, made them last longer; and salt added flavor.



So, conversation—words, phrases, expressions, content that shines bright, deep, brilliant, insightful, that purifies, heals, helps, that preserves what is good, that promotes in style and substance, good values—all of which, adds flavor to situations/circumstances/people. It’s about the way we talk, what we talk about, the words we use, the opinions we have—that they’re interesting. And that the way we live is intriguing, thought-provoking—*attractive!* Not that we have to be “on” morning, noon, and night—because that’s a

pressure too great to bear. It's just that: it's who we are. Who others see us and hear us to be. These are the conditions we can create that can lead to conversations about Jesus Christ and our faith—as Paul wrote in verse 6, “so that you may know how to answer everyone.”

The Apostle Peter put it this way in I Peter 3:15: “But in your hearts set apart Jesus as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”

You see? That statement makes two assumptions: First, that the “hope” that you have in Jesus is obvious, noticeable, to other people. I mean, nobody just walks up to anybody and asks out of the blue, “Say, would you give me the reason for the hope that is within you?” But, they might if you know them and they know you, and it's an observable fact:

“I watch you, I listen to you....”

“I see how you treat people.”

“I notice how you perform under pressure.”

“I listen to how you speak to your kids.”

“Your opinion on that topic we talked about in the meeting intrigued me—where does that come from?”

“You seem happier than most—you smile a lot.”

“When your dad died—you seemed to be at peace....”

“When your wife got sick—I watched how you handled that crisis.”

“Why is that? You seem different than a lot of people that I know. Why is that?”

You see? When that happens, the “open door” is opening a little wider. We can *create* the conditions that bring about *a conversation.*” *Preach the Gospel at all times—when you have to, use words.*”



Yet, at some point, we will have to use words. That leads to the second assumption that Peter makes—that we’re ready with an answer to these questions: “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you the reason” why you’re different. *“Well, truth be told, I’m a follower of Jesus Christ.”*

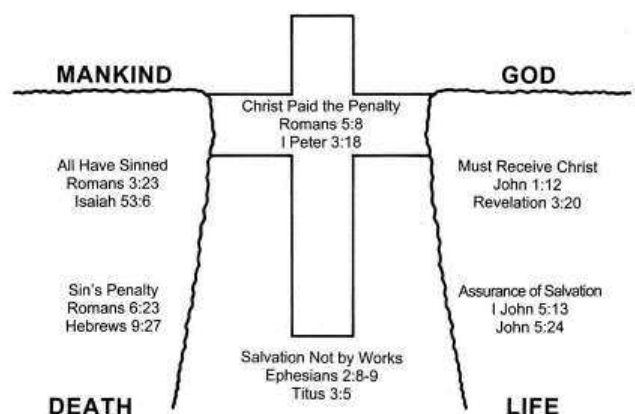
Now, let me say, what they want, what they need, is *your own faith story*: How did you become Christian? When? Why? What did it mean to you then and what does it mean to you now?

So, think about your own story and think about how to share it, as Paul says here in verse 4, “clearly,” as you “should.” In five minutes or less. Then, at that point, you can ask the person if they would like to know more about the good news of Jesus Christ and if they say, “sure,” you need to be “prepared” to tell them and able to tell them, again, in five minutes or less. It can be done. It’s deep, but, really, it’s not that complicated. And—if you don’t know how, you can learn.

Peter is saying for the sake of those whom you love or care about who don’t know the gospel, we should think about the basic content of the gospel and learn how to share it—ahead of time.

Let me offer some suggestions (first six *can be found on the Internet*):

1. My Favorite is the Bridge Illustration: I like it because you can draw it out in front of someone and use Bible verses while you draw it



out—and then that person can take the diagram with them. I’ve drawn this out dozens of times!

2. Four Spiritual Laws by Campus Crusade for Christ.
3. There’s the Evangecube—some of our folks have used this effectively in Cuba and locally.
4. There’s the Evangelism Glove—which is great with children!
5. Evangelism Explosion: asks two key questions (1. If you were to die tonight, do you know for sure that you are going to be with God in heaven? 2. If God were to ask you, “Why should I let you into my heaven?”, what would you say to him?).
6. Dare 2 Share—equips teens to share their faith with their friends.
7. November 20: right here in the Great Hall: “Conversations at Christmas.” Details are in the Bulletin.



But, whatever your preferred method, or whether you come up with something on your own—**Pray!** Before/during (silently)/and after. Pray, verse 2: “devote yourselves to prayer” for your unbelieving friends; verse 3: “pray that God may open a door to your message”; verse 4: “pray that you may proclaim your story and the story of Jesus clearly as you should”; Pray that God will draw your friend/relative/co-worker/neighbor/fellow-student TO Christ...through you.

Last week, Pastor Pete shared that within a five-mile radius of this church are 146,000 people without faith or any on-going relationship with a Bible-believing church. You may work with them; you probably commute with some of them; you may attend school with some of them; they play on your team or their children play on the same team that

your children play on; you probably do business with them; and you may live next to some of those people.

And within a five-mile radius of where you live is a different group of thousands without faith and a church—preach the gospel of Christ—with your life and with your words. Be available, be intentional, and be ready, and, when they're ready—invite them to come with you to worship.

Why? Why is all this so important? My friend, Rich Phillips, once put it like this. He said: If you discovered a cure for cancer one day, you would go to the best doctors at the best hospitals, to good people in government, to the topnotch pharmaceutical companies and to everyone you know: “I’ve found the cure for cancer! I have found the cure for cancer!”

Rich said, “We have the *cure for death!*” That’s right! We have the cure of new life in Jesus Christ and then when life is over—eternal life! The cure for death! That’s great news—so *share* it!

Pray and create the conditions with the way you live and talk that “opens the door” to conversations that might open the door to someone’s conversion.

**“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God.” I Peter 2:12**

Peter, again, in I Peter 2:12: “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God.”

Strange ending to that sentence, right? I mean, how does that work? His optimistic hope is that our good lives and good witnesses might lead unbelievers, even those who may have

once opposed you, to become believers in Christ. I like how *The Message* version puts it: “Live an exemplary life...so that your actions will refute their prejudices. Then they’ll be won over to God’s side and be there to join in the celebration when he arrives.”

Many of you have read the book, *The Treasure Principle*, over the last month. The opening chapter looks at the statement of Jesus where he says, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” The author made the point that one way to understand this principle with respect to earthly treasures is this: “You can’t take it with you, but you can send it on ahead.”

Besides the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the greatest treasures in heaven will be *people*—saved souls and resurrected bodies. In fact, the greatest treasures on earth, really—are people. When it comes to people—to their lives on earth and their eternal destinies, we can create the *conditions* with our lives and words that lead to *conversations* that may lead to *conversions*.

Here’s what I want you to think about: when it comes to *people*, the real treasures on earth and the real treasures in heaven: “You can take them with you, and you can even send them on ahead.”

We have the cure for death! New life now and new life forever. His name is “Jesus.”

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