

Who Wants To Be An Evangelist?
Colossians 4:3-6

Good morning. Thanksgiving is over and the month-long celebration of Christmas has begun. Many of us spent the weekend decorating the house with lights and putting up the tree. Some braver folks put their lives on the line by venturing out to shop this weekend. And with the holiday season comes stress. Stress from seeing family you don't like; stress from trying to buy gifts for those you want to honor this Christmas; stress from the current economic circumstances; stress from strained relationships that are heightened at this time of year. While the Christmas season is a special time of year for many, it is also the busiest and most stressful time of year for many. But the holiday season is also a season of opportunity.

Let me ask you, what comes to mind when I say the word evangelist? Maybe it is some disgraced TV preacher. There are some of those. Maybe it's the guy with the sign on the corner saying "All sinners will go to hell." Or maybe it's the confident extrovert who isn't ashamed or embarrassed by anything. Or maybe it is someone who sells Jesus like he is some used car.

When I hear the word evangelist, two things come to my mind. The first thing I think of is obnoxious. Several years, while working in a retail print shop, we had a customer come get some business cards printed. When he placed his order, he launched into this high pressure, never took a breath gospel spiel and then took the hand of the person taking his order and prayed for them to receive Jesus into their life and then congratulated them on being a Christian now. Being the token Christian in the office, they couldn't wait to tell me the story. And have a little laugh at my expense. That's the picture that pops into my head when I hear the word evangelist.

But something else pops into my head that is just as clear. It's guilt. Didn't Jesus say all of us are supposed to be telling others about Jesus? Why can't I be bold? Why can't I talk openly and freely like other people I know? And then I make all kinds of excuses to dissuade my guilt. Things like, "I don't want to offend anyone." Or "I don't know what to say." Or, "I don't want people to think I am weird." But strangely enough, this self talk doesn't work. I still feel guilty.

I suspect my two perceptions of evangelism are common for those of us inside the church. We don't want to be linked with "weird" and yet we feel guilty when someone talks about evangelism or sharing Jesus or asks that horrible question, "When as the last time *you* led anyone to Jesus?" And so, we oftentimes do nothing. Not because we don't care, but because we don't know what to do. We don't know how to evangelize without being weird or offending someone. We don't know what to say. We don't know how to start a conversation. And we are afraid someone might ask a question we can't answer. And so we remain silent and guilty.

So today, I'd like us to begin considering some ways we might be able to overcome our fear, silence and guilt. We won't answer all our questions today. I'm not rolling out some new evangelistic strategy. But I would like us to begin considering how we view evangelism and our role in it. And I'd like us to do that by studying what the Bible has to say about evangelism. If you have a Bible, you can turn to Colossians 4. Or can just follow along with the notes in your program or on the screen. Let's begin by reading Colossians 4:3-6.▶

^{NIV} **Colossians 4:3** And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. ⁴ Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.▶ ⁵ Be wise

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

In these four verses I see ► three primary principles about evangelism. Let's look at them one by one.

Principle 1. ► Pray

^{NIV} **Colossians 4:3** And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. ⁴ Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

Paul asks the Colossians to pray for 2 things. First, Paul asks them to pray that God ► would open a door for the message. I don't know about you, but I think that's pretty important (and freeing): God opens the door, not us. Paul just prays for open doors. He is praying for opportunities to talk about Jesus. Our role as evangelists is not to break down the heart door of every person we see with the Bible and Jesus. Our role is to pray that God would open a door. Our role is not to save people. Or sell them on Jesus. We pray for opportunities, for open doors to his message.

Secondly, I think we pray that we would walk through the open door. Look at verse 4.

^{NIV} **Colossians 4:4** Pray that I may ► **proclaim it clearly**, as I should.

Once God opened the door and provided an opportunity, Paul wanted to walk through the door. He wanted to take advantage of the doors God opened by being clear with the message.

For me, principle 1 is very freeing. My job is to pray that God would open doors and that I would walk through them. I don't have to create opportunities or sell anything or act weird. But I do need to pray. I need to pray that God would provide opportunities and that I would recognize the opportunity and use it.

So, what might open doors look like? ► In what ways does God provide opportunities for His message? For the next couple of minutes, I'd like to look at 3 ways that God opens doors; three open doors He gives us to walk through.

First, the open door to ► invest in people who need the message. Sometimes God opens doors for us to develop relationships or meet a need of those outside the church. Sometimes it might be with money. Maybe it's inviting a neighbor over for dinner. Or helping them trim a tree. Or baking them a cake. Or being a trusted ear to listen. Or maybe just stopping when you see them outside and saying hello. An investment of time that says, "I want to be your friend." Maybe this Christmas, God opens a door for you to personally invest in someone's life. Maybe it's a neighbor, a co-worker or a family member. Maybe it's a complete stranger that God brings across your path. As a church, we do some of this corporately with things like Sharing Tree and Project Turkey. But I am talking about one-on-one, face-to-face investment in someone God places in your sphere of influence.

Jeff Merry has a neighbor he is investing in. One day, he and his neighbor were chatting out in the driveway and his neighbor was stressing out over some stuff. And Jeff listened and said something, "Wow, that does sound stressful. When I get stressed out, I try to pray. Would it be ok if I prayed for you right now?" And the guy said ok.

But Jeff wanting to be sensitive to the beliefs of his friend who is an active Hindu said, “I pray to the God of the Bible in Jesus name. Is that ok?” And his friend said yes. So he prayed for him. That’s an investment. Maybe you don’t feel comfortable praying with people. That’s ok. The investment is the important part, not necessarily how you invest.

I think we should be praying for open doors to invest in people. And I think we should also be praying that we walk through that investment door when God opens it.

The second open door might be to ► invite someone to hear the gospel. In the recent past we have not done a good job at providing a safe place for you to invite someone to hear the gospel. In 2009, we aim to change that. But it is Christmas time. And we do have a few opportunities to invite people. The Christmas Tea this coming weekend for you ladies. We have our annual Children’s Musical on the 13th and 14th. Then we have the Sunday before Christmas. Then we have Christmas Eve. Praying that God would open the door to opportunities might include the opportunity to invite someone to hear the gospel this Christmas season. Will you walk you though that door?

Finally, asking God to open the door might mean you get to ► inform them of your own story. You don’t have to create opportunities to articulate what Jesus means to you or how he has changed your life. God will sometimes open that door for you. Just walk through it.

So, principle 1 is pray. Pray that God would open doors to invest, invite or inform and pray that we would walk through them by investing, inviting or informing. I like those 3 words- invest, invite and inform- because it creates some steps for those of us not ready or sure how to inform about Jesus. But we can pray for opportunities to invest in people. And then moving on to inviting them to a safe place to hear about Jesus and then maybe someday being able to explain my story of discovering Jesus. But no matter where you are, all of us can invest, invite or inform. Start where you are and pray for open doors and pray for the strength and courage to walk through it when it opens.

► That brings me to principle number 2. Look at verse 5. ►

^{NIV} **Colossians 4:5** Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.

Principle number 2 is ► behave. Paul says we are to behave wisely around outsiders and take advantage of our opportunities. . There is nothing really tricky in this verse. It means just what it looks like it means. We should act or behave wisely toward those outside the church. Maybe you have heard or even said something like, “I don’t care what people outside the church think.” I think Paul would disagree. Paul wants us to act wisely and make the most of our opportunities.

Like any good missionary, it helps us to understand our culture so we can be wise. We don’t want to compromise the Bible or the gospel, but we also don’t want to be needlessly offensive either. Maybe we need to ask more often, “Is it wise to behave like this? Does this help me take advantage of open doors or does it close open doors? Do my actions draw people to Jesus? Do my actions repel people from Jesus?” You can ask those questions about any number of things: politics, community involvement, church involvement, open sins I commit against God. I know I don’t have to live a certain way to earn God’s favor. But I do have to behave a certain way to earn some trust, so that people might see Jesus in me.

►“Make the most” in verse 5 actually means “to buy up every opportunity.” There is an urgency in Paul’s message. Don’t waste the chances you have to invest, invite or inform. Pray for opportunities but don’t slam the door on opportunity by acting foolishly. ►

Finally, we come to principle 3. We find it in verse 6.►

^{NIV} **Colossians 4:6** Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Principle number 3 is ► speak grace. It basically has the same effect as principle 2, but in what we say. How we talk and the things we say make a difference. Our speech should be gracious. Do we extend grace in our speech... about our family... about our government... about other races... about criminals... about people we disagree with... about other Christians... about our co-workers? Is our speech gracious? Remember, grace means unmerited favor. Does our speech, particularly with people with disagree with, demonstrate unmerited favor? Like it or not, our speech has powerful implications. Look at Proverbs 18:21.►

^{NIV} **Proverbs 18:21** The tongue has the power of life and death...

Or James 3. ►

^{NIV} **James 3:9** With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

Our tongue has the ability to praise and curse. It has the ability to heal and harm. It has the ability to encourage or discourage. What we say and how we say it matters.

But Paul also says our speech is said to be seasoned with salt. Earlier this year, Pastor Bob talked about being salty, so I don’t want to spend a lot of time on it. But basically, just as salt makes food more palatable, so our speech should make the claims of Jesus more palatable. Christianity is supposed to be flavored by the gracious speech of Christians. Like our behavior, our speech either helps us walk through the open doors, or it slams them closed.

►So, there are our 3 principles for evangelism: pray, behave and speak. And when I look at these things I realize something very important. In fact it is the big idea this morning.► Here it is: evangelism is a lifestyle, not an event. We oftentimes define evangelism as the proclamation of the gospel. I would argue that evangelism is anything that nudges a person towards Jesus. Evangelism isn’t something extra I add to my life. Evangelism happens when I pray the way Paul asks us to pray. Evangelism happens when my behavior is wise towards outsiders. Evangelism happens when my speech is gracious towards others and seasoned with salt. It’s a lifestyle. It is a part of who I am, not something that I do.

I started this morning by saying I didn’t want to be weird, but I feel guilty for not evangelizing. Lifestyle evangelism takes care of both. I can pray for God to open doors and pray he helps me walk through them. That doesn’t make me weird, offensive or guilty. I can behave in a way that honors God with my life. We aren’t perfect. But we can love people and honor people and meet needs and grow more like Jesus by following His word. Living

like that doesn't make me weird or offensive or guilty. And I can speak with grace towards people. Frankly, this is probably the most difficult, because oftentimes we speak without thinking. Who among us hasn't put our foot in our mouth? But I can speak graciously, answer everyone graciously and it doesn't make me weird or offensive or guilty. When my form of evangelism is lifestyle evangelism like Paul describes in these verses, I'm not weird or obnoxious and I

don't have to feel guilty. Sure, we're going to miss some open doors. We are going to say or do things that discredit God. Sometimes we might have to say, "I'm sorry." But we just keep praying, behaving and speaking.

So pray. ► Pray for opportunities to invest, invite or inform and then invest, invite and inform. Behave wisely in a way that validates God's message. And speak graciously. Evangelism is a lifestyle, not an event.

So, I'd like to ask you to do something for me. As the worship team comes back to lead us in a closing song, I'd like to challenge us to pray- both individually and corporately as a church. Individually, I'd like you to pray for 2 people this holiday season. Pray that God would open the door for you to invest, invite or inform and that you would have the wisdom, courage or anything else you need to walk through that door. If you would be willing to do that, I'd like you grab a connection card.

1. Go ahead and grab it right now. Here's what I'd like to do. If you are willing to pray for 2 people this holiday season, in the space on the back, I'd like you to write the first name of those 2 people. Last names are not necessary and neither is your name unless you want to provide it. If you do provide your name, we'll pray for you by name. As Jeff leads us, I'd like to ask you to bring your card and place it on the advent table.
2. The second thing we're going to do is get together every Sunday in December to pray for the people these names represent. And you are more than welcome to come. We will meet in room 10 at 8:15 AM every Sunday in December to pray that God would open doors of opportunity both individually and for our church corporately.