

HOW TO OPEN A DOOR

Col. 4:2-4

3 Boy Scouts helping a little old lady across the street:

“Why did it take 3?” “She didn’t want to go!”

When we were in college, girls used to appreciate it when a guy opened the door for them.

When our oldest daughter went to college, guys didn’t do that anymore.

Women started communicating that they didn’t *want* anyone to help them.

“We can do it ourselves, thank you!”

Deanna started to *wait* for someone to take the hint and open the door.

Then she responded gratefully.

It seemed strange, but guys enjoyed chance to be gentlemen and open doors.

People don’t always *want* someone to open the door for them!

What’s true in the social realm, is also true in the spiritual realm.

People don’t *want* someone to open the door—to share the truth with them.

We prefer to stay the way we are!

Postmodern society wants us to leave people alone; let them identify their own truth!

When we break that rule, people often don’t appreciate our effort on their behalf.

So, how are we suppose to effectively share Christ with people?

In Acts, we observe the effectiveness of the church in sharing good news about Christ with their generation.

Thousands of people are added to the church daily!

Why don't WE see thousands of people come to Christ today like they did?

At least **3 reasons** explain why we don't see the same kind of response:

1. The unique moment in the progress of God's program.

In the initial chapters, the good news is being proclaimed to Israel.

In Acts 2, at Pentecost, people that God calls "devout" [=>"rightly religious"] come from all over the world to worship the true God.

Applied to true worshipers—O.T. saints—people like Abraham, Moses, David, and Daniel, who believe God and expect God to keep His promises.

In N.T. it describes Simeon, the men who buried Stephen and mourned for him, and Cornelius.

These are people *God* considers godly.

They're waiting for Messiah and for God to fulfill His Word.

These people are especially prepared by God for what happened that day.

Peter announces: Jesus, whom their people crucified, is God and Messiah.

3000 acknowledge the truth that day and turn to Him.

2. The unique movement of the Holy Spirit in their midst.

He has come as promised, and affirms His presence by supernatural demonstrations of power.

It's apparent that God's at work in a unique way.

3. Jesus' followers are aware of their total dependence on the Spirit to draw people to Christ.

While we're unable to duplicate the first two *unique* circumstances, the third is as necessary for opening a door today as in Peter's and Paul's days.

We're not capable of convincing people of their need and drawing people to Christ.

Only God's Spirit can do that.

Over and over again, Paul reminds us of **our dependence on God** to accomplish anything of permanent value.

We start our walk with God by trusting Christ. We can't save ourselves.

In Gal. 3, Paul asks how can we *start* by trusting Christ, and then **think we can finish the process ourselves.**

We live a godly life by trusting Christ.

In Gal. 5, we don't produce spiritual fruit by our own efforts.

Only God's Spirit can produce the fruit of the Spirit.

The same is true about sharing Christ with others.

WE can't pull it off ourselves.

Even **Jesus** says, "No one comes to me **unless the Father draws Him.**"

In Col. 4, **Paul**, the church-planting apostle urges people to pray for Him **that GOD might open a door** for the proclamation of the gospel.

If we think **WE** can force open a door that **GOD** hasn't opened,
we're deceiving ourselves!

We can't open the door.

We can't convince people.

We can't draw people to Christ. **Only GOD can do that!**

In Col. 4, Paul tells us how WE can open a door for people around us to pass through to attract them to our Savior—even Paul had to work this way!

How can we make a difference in our community?

How can we be used by God to make an impact on the world around us?

Paul exhorts us to imitate his example, to dedicate ourselves to *prayer*, watching intently, with an attitude of gratitude.

Ogilvie: "We have arrived at a strange state of self-sufficiency in contemporary Christianity. We have organized out the need for Christ's intervention.

Churches are filled with competent people who can handle daily living rather effectively.

Prayer for Christ's power is reserved for crises and monumental tasks.

We don't need Him for daily living....

We don't catch the momentous power available to maximize the mundane and sensitize life with the presence of Christ.

***If we're going to share Christ effectively with others,
GOD must open the door.***

God opens the door in response to prayer. => 4:2-4

3 DESCRIPTIONS OF WHAT OUR PRAYER SHOULD LOOK LIKE:

* Our Prayer should be watchful like a military sentry in battle 4:2a

He must be vigilant, never sleeping nor relaxing,

lest the enemy move in by surprise and eliminate him and his companions.

Authentic prayer requires alertness,

expecting God to answer at any moment, watching to see how He will do it.

* Our Prayer should be with thanksgiving 4:2b

Response of faith. **We ask with gratitude when we expect God to do something!**

True of prayer in general—but especially of prayer that God will draw people to Christ.

Too often we fail to be thankful, even *after* God shows us His response.

Like our children, we keep asking for more, but never stop to say thank you for what we've already received. Does that make us feel like giving more?

God is the giving God, James affirms, but, like a parent,

He wants us to respond gratefully.

[In addition to praying expectantly and thankfully, we should . . .]

* Pray for people who proclaim the gospel 4:3-4

He's not asking for vague general prayer: "Lord, bless Paul."

There's a specific purpose to our praying:

* Pray that God may open the door 3a

Pray God might open a door through which the Word might penetrate to reach people who hear it.

Paul prays personally that he might present the Word of God faithfully.

He's intent on reaching people around him with Good News—even in jail!

He desires the prayer support of God's people, **that God would open a door.**

He isn't asking for open *prison* doors, to escape affliction.

He asks for an open door so *the Gospel* can enter.

It's more important that he be a *faithful minister* than a *free man*.

He isn't seeking personal *safety* or *material* help, but effective *ministry*.

Following Paul's example, when WE pray, we ought to ask God to give US opportunities, that we might explain the truth clearly.

We spend too much time trying to force the door open ourselves!

We ought to spend more time asking **GOD** to open the door!

=> PRAY FOR TWO!

Rogelio's story

Paul Cedar's story

Paul had the privilege of working with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Preparing for a crusade in Denver. He was invited to speak at a Christian Women's Club luncheon one day, at a country club in the foothills, just above Denver. It was a spring morning, there had been a light snow the night before, everything was storybook perfect. A beautiful day. "I did

what I was invited to do. I preached a simple Gospel message and invited any who would like to trust Christ to respond; a number did.

"One of them was, a vivacious young wife and mother. Some people become Christians, they turn to Christ and don't have a great emotional outburst. She was filled with the joy of the Lord. She came back to meet us, my wife and I. "You know, this is wonderful! It's the most wonderful thing that's ever happened to me, but I don't know why I came."

"I thought, now that's a little strange. I said, "Well, did a friend invite you?" "Oh no. I've never liked Christians. I stay away from Christians." I said, "Well, how did you get here?" She said, "That's what I don't understand." "I saw a newspaper ad; it told about the luncheon and gave a number to make a reservation." She said, "I *never* do things like this. I never risk. I never go anywhere alone. I called and made a reservation, drove up here, [an hour from the city.] I heard the gospel and received Christ. I'm so happy, but I don't know why I came!"

I smiled at her and I said, "Well, I would guess someone's been praying for you." She became very serious. She said, "Oh, no. I told you. I don't *know* any Christians. There wouldn't be anyone praying for me." I said, "Well, it's not important that you know who it is. But God just may someday let you know who's been praying for you." A week later, I was working in the office and the phone rang. A hysterical woman was on the other end. I calmed her down and found out it was this young lady.

"I gotta tell you what happened to me this morning. I was cleaning my house and the doorbell rang. I went to the door, and here was a young lady about my age, I've never seen

her before. She was holding a cake; she was very nervous, and she said, "Hello, my name is so-and-so. I'm your neighbor from across the alley. I saw you and your family move in several months ago and I've been wanting to bake a cake and welcome you to our neighborhood." She said, "I finally got it done today. Welcome!"

"The new Christian was impressed. She invited her guest in. They went into the kitchen. She made some coffee, cut the cake, and sat down. The new Christian had a first love for Christ. The gospel was good news to her." "She didn't know any better." She thought what had happened to her was the most wonderful thing that ever happened in her life.

Spontaneous. No training, she just began to tell her guest how she had come to know Christ a couple of weeks before. In the midst of sharing, her friend who brought the cake began to cry. This new Christian stopped. She said, "Oh, I'm sorry, if I've offended you in any way." Her friend said, "Oh, no. You haven't offended me. This is wonderful!"

"I was washing dishes when the moving van arrived a few months ago. I saw you and your husband and children come into the house, and God laid you on my heart. I've been praying for you every day, praying for enough courage to come meet you. Finally God gave me enough courage to come, and He's already done it. You've already come to trust Christ."

When the young lady's friend left, the Lord brought her mother-in-law to mind. She and her mother-in-law hadn't talked to each other in months. They despised each other. She thought, "This is what my mother-in-law needs. She needs Jesus, I'm going to call her and tell her what's happened to me."

So she went to the phone to call her. When her mother-in-law answered, she said, "Darling, before you say anything, I want to ask you to forgive me for how I've treated you. I want to tell you something. Something wonderful has happened to me. She told her how she had become a Christian a few months before. She had been praying for her estranged son and daughter-in-law. She promised God that whenever they made contact, the first thing she would do was ask forgiveness, and the second would be to tell them about Jesus."

"See, the wonderful thing about prayer is that anybody can do it. Wherever you are. Every believer, young or old, can pray for lost people. God can use us to bring people to Christ."

*** Pray that we may proclaim the gospel clearly. 3b-4**

Pray **WE** might **CLEARLY** present His Word to people who need the truth.

This request is important when so much confusion surrounds us.

We must be clear, so people understand the gospel and understand what they're accepting or rejecting.

The goal: to proclaim good news **clearly**

so people will understand how we can come to God through Jesus Christ.

We think we have to have all the answers for people's questions

If we don't know the answer, we might be embarrassed!

Sharing Christ doesn't depend on our ability to answer their questions.

My favorite witness: John 9—Witness of a blind man

Spurgeon's powerhouse"

“While I’m preaching upstairs, hundreds of my people are in this room praying.”
Would it make a difference if hundreds prayed each week that God would enable Steve to proclaim God’s Word effectively as he should?!!

If we desire to be effective in sharing Christ with others, we must make a commitment to *PRAY CONTINUALLY*.

2nd requirement to be effective in sharing Christ with others: 4:5

OUR CONDUCT 4:5

Paul Cedar: **The most powerful evangelistic tool God has given. One we seldom think about. It’s AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE.**

Walk wisely before people who don’t know Christ, so our lifestyle will attract unsaved people.

We convince people of their need by a lifestyle that is different, but attractive.

He urges us to “*redeem the time*”—“buy it up”—use it wisely.

Take advantage of every opportunity to accomplish something of lasting value.

—especially to spread the good news about Jesus!

Are you chained to a prison guard? [Paul was!]

Make the most of the opportunity! That starts with praying for him!

Imagine guards’ predicament—chained to Paul, captive to hear good news.

Unable to escape, for a 2-3 hour assignment!

Don't just "put in your time!"

Paul wants to use every opportunity to present good news clearly. *Do we?*

3rd requirement to be effective in sharing Christ with others:

OUR CONVERSATION 4:6

Our impression on people around us is influenced by what we say.

THREE CHARACTERISTICS OF APPROPRIATE SPEECH.

1. Our speech should be GRACIOUS 6a

Nothing is so damaging to our testimony as a sharp, bitter tongue.

–always criticizing or complaining about something.

Our speech should be marked by the kind of grace God has shown us.

2. Our speech should be SEASONED WITH SALT. 6b

SALT WAS USED 3 WAYS:

*** Salt is useful to season food – to improve flavor.**

Our speech can produce a pleasant "flavor."

It shouldn't resemble food without salt; flat and flavorless.

Nor like food that is so salty, or so spicy, no one can stand it.

Our conversation ought to include just the right ingredients to give it a pleasant taste, attractive and pleasing to those who listen.

*** Salt is useful to preserve food – to prevent spoiling.**

Include ingredients to prevent corruption or destruction of listeners.

NOT critical; but we should care enough to correct people going astray.

* **Salt is useful to create thirst.**

Our speech should create *thirst*, desire for change, attract them to Christ.

Our words should include appropriate elements to attract people who don't know Christ.

How about our speech? Does it accomplish these functions?

Is it pleasing? Does it build up and encourage people or tear down?

Does it protect people from destruction and contamination?

Does it make people thirst for God?

3. Our Speech Should Give an Appropriate Response 6c

An appropriate "response" involves more than just our speech

An appropriate response involves how we react to others

An appropriate response unites words and actions.

If we don't demonstrate genuine interest, people will reject our testimony.

Prayer is key to obtaining power to practice truth and explain it clearly to others.

Our conduct and conversation demonstrate that truth is valid to those watching.

So, how can WE make an impact on the world around us?

THREE CHARACTERISTICS TO KEEP ACTIVE IN OUR LIFE:

1. **Dedicate yourself to continual prayer that HE will open the door.**

2. **Walk wisely**—Take advantage of every opportunity to share the good news of Christ clearly, every time God opens the door.
3. **Talk wisely**—speak with appropriate elements to be pleasing, to prevent corruption, to give people a thirst for Christ.

Which of these areas does God need to work on in our life?

Paul is issuing a call to godly living—in our lifestyle and in our conversation.

Basic to the process is understanding that **only GOD can produce what we need.**

But it's not vague and nebulous—it's focused.

The focus—the purpose: to communicate to lost society the good news of Jesus Christ.

How are we doing? Are we fulfilling our mission?

That's why God has left us here.

He wants a people, to live godly lives before people of this community, to communicate good news of salvation through Jesus Christ, and attract people to Him.

To trust HIM to produce all we need to share Christ effectively with people in our community.

Is that our goal in living? What do we need to work on to fulfill our mission?

How's our prayer life?

How's our walk?

How's our talk?

Are WE asking God to use us as effective instruments to draw people to Christ?