How many of you came to a saving faith in Jesus Christ without the aid of any other? I would argue that none of you did. But let’s suppose for the sake of argument that once upon a time, while staying in a hotel, you came across a Bible in the nightstand beside your bed. When you opened it you found the Roman Road printed on the inside cover. The Roman Road outlines the good news of salvation using verses taken entirely from Paul’s letter to the Romans.

Shutting off the TV, you read Romans 3:23, “…all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” and realized for the first time that you were a sinner. Next, you read Romans 6:23, which says, “…the wages of sin is death,” and realized then and there that death would be the penalty for your sin. But then you read the rest of that verse which says, “…the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord,” and realized that Jesus came to deal with death by offering you the gift of everlasting life. Next you read Romans 5:8, “God demonstrated his love for us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us,” and you realized that Christ died in your place, for your sin, as your substitute, paying the penalty for your transgression. After that you read Romans 10:9, “…if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

And in that moment, something stirred in your heart. You believed what you read and prayed the simple sinner’s prayer printed in the Bible: “Lord Jesus, I believe I’m a sinner who deserves to die an eternal death; but I believe you paid the price for my sin when you died in my place. And because of the resurrection, I believe you live to give me the gift of everlasting life. I’m sorry for my sin. I receive you as my Savior and will serve you as my Lord. Save me now and give me the gift of life eternal. Amen.”

Then and there, in that hotel room, you came to a saving faith in Jesus Christ without the aid of any other. Right? Not quite. The Apostle Paul was with you in that room. After all, he wrote the book of Romans. The Roman Christians were with you too. They cherished Paul’s letter and passed it down from one generation to the next. The early Church was by your side. She received the book of Romans, recognized its divine inspiration, and included it in the Bible we have today. John Wycliffe was near at hand. He was the first person to translate the Bible into English. Some unknown Christian was with you too. He or she put that Bible in your room and said a prayer that you would meet Jesus by reading its pages.

You see, you didn’t come to faith all by yourself without the aid of any other. In fact, none of us does. All of us come to Christ through the influence of others who share the gospel with us, pointing us to Jesus Christ. And that’s why we have an obligation to share the gospel, too. In the words of our Protestant purpose statement, “We are
embraced by God’s grace and live for his glory; growing in Christ, going in service, and showing the gospel – together!"

But how do we show the gospel in a military setting? Generally speaking, we are free to express our faith so long as we don’t undermine military readiness, unit cohesion, or good order and discipline. But how do we do that? How do we show the gospel in a way that doesn’t undermine readiness, cohesion, good order, or discipline?

I believe Paul points the way in Colossians 4:2-6. In this particular passage, he tells us how to share our faith in a military setting. You see, Paul wrote this passage while guarded by Roman soldiers in a Roman prison. In Colossians 4:3 Paul mentions his imprisonment and in Colossians 4:18 he says, “Remember my chains.” Nevertheless, despite his imprisonment, he shared the gospel with great success, showing the gospel to the soldiers who held him. In fact, he wrote the following about his imprisonment and sent it to the church at Philippi: “…what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel, (Paul wrote), so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ.” (Ph. 1:12-13)

Yes, Paul knew how to show the gospel in a military setting. So what can we learn from him about showing the gospel in our own setting? Well, in Colossians 4:2-6, Paul lays down three important principles for showing or sharing the gospel. First, he says we should talk to God before we talk to others. Second, he says we should walk the walk before we talk the talk. Third, he says we should spread the word before our lips fall forever silent.

First, if we want to show the gospel in this or any setting, we should speak to God before we speak to others. In Colossians 4:2-4, Paul says, “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. At the same time pray for us as well that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, so that I may reveal it clearly, as I should.”

My friends, prayer is essential for success in sharing or showing the gospel. It’s essential because two important things happen when we pray. First, God prepares us to show the gospel and then God prepares others to receive it. Yes, as we pray, God prepares us to show the gospel. You see, when we pray, Christ rubs off on us and people are drawn to Christ through us because they see Christ in us!

It’s a little like this. Have you ever spent time with someone then walked away with their fragrance lingering on you? Perhaps it was their perfume. Perhaps it was their cologne. Perhaps it was the scent of their tobacco. My father smoked a pipe when I was young and to this day there’s a vanilla flavored tobacco scent that always makes me think of him.

Well the same thing happens to us whenever we pray. We come away from prayer covered with the fragrance of Jesus Christ. This is how Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians
2:14-16: “...thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one (we are) a fragrance from death to death (those are the ones who don’t like the aroma of Christ; and, as a consequence, turn away from him and die in their sin), (but) to the other (we are) a fragrance from life to life (those are the ones that are drawn to eternal life by the aroma of Christ that lingers on us).

So in prayer, God prepares us to show the gospel. And through prayer, God prepares others to receive it. That’s why Paul asked the Colossians to pray for him and his companions. In Colossians 4:3 Paul says, “pray for us as well that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, so that I may reveal it clearly, as I should.” (Col 4:3) Yes, our prayers open a door for the word and prepare others to receive the message of Jesus.

You see, Jesus said, “No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me.” (Jn. 6:44) If the Father isn’t drawing a person to Christ then nothing we say will draw him. But if the Father is drawing a person to Christ, then we don’t have to be a Billy Graham to persuade him. All we need to do is show him the gospel and he will come. And prayer is how we participate in the preparation of his heart. Through prayer we ask God for an open door into his heart and for an open opportunity to reveal the message clearly.

So if we want to show the gospel in this or in any setting then we need to talk to God before we talk to others. Next, we need to walk the walk before we talk the talk. You see there’s nothing worse than a person who talks a lot about Christ but lives a life that’s an embarrassment to Christ.

I remember one officer who was the most vocally religious of any officer I ever met. He was always talking about Jesus. But he was prone to public fits of rage where he would curse in the vilest of fashion, often screaming as he did so. By his very behavior he completely discredited the faith he so vocally professed and seriously undermined the witness of every Christian in that command.

That’s why Paul says, “Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders.” (Col. 4:5) Or as some translations have it: “Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside.” Yes, we need to walk the walk before we talk the talk. We need to live lives that show Christ. We may not be perfect this side of heaven, but Christ needs to be seen in us and his fragrance needs to be on us.

Yes, we need to walk the walk before we talk the talk. Titus 2:7-8 says, “Show yourself in all respects a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity, and sound speech that cannot be censured; then any opponent will be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us.” In a similar way, Peter reinforces this principle when he
writes: “Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.” (1 Pe. 2:11-12) That’s just Peter’s way of telling us to walk the walk before we talk the talk!

Yes, if we want to show the gospel in this or in any setting then we need to talk to God before we talk to anyone; we need to walk the walk before we talk the talk; and finally, we need to spread the word before our lips fall forever silent. You see, life is short. We mustn’t waste it. We only have a few short days to show the gospel to our generation. We must seize the day before it slips away. That’s why Paul says, “Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time.” (Col. 4:5)

The phrase, “making the most of the time” is probably better translated as “redeeming or buying up every opportunity.” The original Greek paints an interesting picture. It’s the picture of someone buying something quickly before it slips away. You’ve had the experience of finding a great deal on something at the store and buying it quickly before someone else does or before the sale expires. I have vivid memories of going to Walmart at zero dark thirty on a Black Friday to purchase a game system that was on sale. I nearly ran to the back of the store, weaving in and out of an enormous crowd, grabbed the system, tucked it under my arm like a football, hustled through checkout, and rushed home with the score! Frightening! I’ll never do that again! But I didn’t want to let a great deal slip away. So I seized the day. I redeemed the time. I made the most of the opportunity before it was forever gone.

That’s what Paul is telling us here. We need to spread the word before our lips fall forever silent. Life is short. We mustn’t waste it. We only have a few short days to show the gospel to our own generation. And part of the process of showing the gospel is sharing the gospel message. It’s not enough to walk the walk. We have to talk the talk! That’s why Paul says, “Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.” (Col. 4:5-6)

You see, your life can support or undermine your message but it’s the message of Christ’s life and not the example of your life that brings people to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. Romans 10:17 says, “…faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.” So we must tell people about Christ and share his words with them so they can put their faith in him and receive salvation from him.

And if we walk the walk before we talk the talk then there will be ample opportunity to tell others about Jesus because they will be asking us about the differences they see in us. That’s why Paul says, “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.” (Col. 4:6) If you’re walking the walk, then you’ll get questions like these:
Why do you go to church so often?
I saw you praying before your meal. Why do you do that?
You sure read the Bible a lot. What does it have to say?
Why do you give so much money to Christian causes?
Why do you volunteer at the local mission?
Why do you teach Sunday School?
Why do you sing in the Chapel choir?
Why don’t you drink as much as the rest of us do when we go out on liberty?
Why won’t you go to that movie with us? It may be dirty but it’s not that bad.

The questions will be endless and the opportunities limitless. Does that mean we can only share our faith if people ask about it? Not really. Anytime anyone shares their opinion on a matter then we are free to share our faith-informed views so long as we do so in a way that doesn’t undermine military readiness, unit cohesion, good order, or discipline. Peer-to-peer sharing is almost always acceptable.

Senior-subordinate sharing is a bit more complex. As the senior in a military environment, you must safeguard everyone’s right to exercise their own religion. Although you are free to exercise your own faith you must do so in a way that doesn’t prefer your religion over other religions or over no religion at all. And you must be scrupulous to evaluate your subordinates strictly on their performance and not their religious preference. That said, you can always walk the walk, set the example, answer questions, share with peers, and, where appropriate, describe to subordinates how your own faith has helped you in life and leadership.

And how do you do that? How do you share the message? How do you talk the talk? Well Paul tells us right here. He says, “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt.” As used here, salt probably refers to the way it adds flavor to food, making it more palatable. When we share our faith, we need to do so in a way that is pleasing and palatable. People may be offended by the message of Jesus Christ. They may not want to be told that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. They may not want to be told that the wages of sin is death and eternal life is only found through faith in Jesus Christ. They may be offended by his ethical instruction because it often runs against the mores of our current culture. Yes, they may be offended by the message of Jesus. But they shouldn’t be offended by the way we present it. We should present it in a pleasing and palatable way…always gracious and seasoned with salt.

In the end, whenever we share our faith, we should make sure we treat everyone with dignity and respect – especially those who differ with us on religious grounds. In the words of 1 Peter 3:15, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” (NIV)
The other day a television commentator was talking about atheists. He said, “Atheists are upset because Christians have religious holidays and atheists don’t. Well let’s give them a holiday. I suggest April 1st!” He thought that was funny and the crowd roared with their approval. But that kind of speech is not gracious. It’s not seasoned with salt. It isn’t gentle and it doesn’t treat others with dignity and respect. May God help us to do better!

Friends, according to our new Protestant purpose statement, “We are embraced by God’s grace and live for his glory; growing in Christ, going in service, and showing the gospel – together!” May God help us to show the gospel more effectively by talking to God before we talk to others; by walking the walk before we talk the talk; and by spreading the word before our lips fall forever silent. Amen.