

There's a perfect moment, according to the chef on TV, to add your seasonings to fried food. You have a window of less than a minute after you remove your cooked food from the oil to add your salt and spices; any later and the seasonings will just fall off instead of absorbing into the food.

It's different with grilled food. The experts say it's best to marinate your food in spices before grilling. And with some foods, especially desserts, you don't want to add the finishing touches until you are just about to serve them. It seems, then, that cooking skill has as much to do with timing as having the right ingredients.

Timing is an issue for us Christians, too, as we bear witness to all that our Savior has done. If it weren't, we could fulfill our Savior's Great Commission simply by borrowing bullhorns and shouting Bible passages to people as we drove up and down the streets of our city. God calls us to be wiser than that, though. He gives us certain opportunities to speak his Word to people who do not yet believe; he then expects that we will capitalize on them.

"Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity," God says through the apostle Paul. "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (Colossians 4:5,6).

Only salt can make food taste truly salty. And only the grace to which Paul refers can make a person truly believe in Jesus as their Savior. But it takes wisdom in each case to know how much to add and when. Different foods need to be seasoned in different ways. Different people need to have the Gospel presented to them in different ways. And since we want to be able to "answer everyone" with the only answers that matter in life, it is wise for us to get to know each person to whom we witness so that we can give them the right message at the right time.

You may have a friend right now who is eager to be invited to church. You may have another friend who may be offended if you invited them to church, but would gladly listen to you tell them about your faith. Yet another person you know might not be interested at all in talking "religion" with you, but your friendly nature and the kindnesses you show them now may give you an opening to talk about Jesus at some later date. Each case reminds us of Paul's words: "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders."

Does it sound too hard? It isn't. Because it truly doesn't depend on us. The power is in the Word. And the wisdom to read people and give them what they need at the right time is a gift from God, as well. Let's ask God for that gift today and trust that he will continue to use us as his messengers.

Prayer: Dear Father, sometimes when I try to talk about what your Son Jesus did for me, I become defensive and nervous. Remind me that your Spirit works through your Word to create and sustain faith, and that nobody's salvation depends on me winning an argument. Give me such love for my family and friends that I can see when you have created an opening for me to give them comfort from Holy Scripture. Keep me diligent in my study of your Word that I can be ready to give clear answers to whatever questions I face. In your name I pray, Amen.

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