

“In Defense of Kindness: Kindness in Conversation”
Colossians 4:6 & James 1:19

We will begin today with a practical exercise. I invite you to turn to a neighbor and try to plan a party together. There are no limits on your imagination—no budget constraints, no guest-list restrictions. Dream big.

There is only one rule: One person will begin with an idea, and the other must respond starting with the words, “**Yes, but...**” Every single response back and forth must begin with, “Yes, but...”

Let’s take two minutes to do this. Go.

(Pause)

How did it go? Were you able to accomplish anything? Did it feel like a party you’d actually want to attend?

Now, let’s try it a different way. Same exercise, same partner, but this time, your response must begin with the words, “**Yes, and...**” Every idea must be met with, “Yes, and...”

Let’s take another two minutes. Go.

(Pause)

How did that feel?

There is a massive gulf between these two attitudes in conversation. One focuses on obstacles and disagreement; the other focuses on possibilities. Unfortunately, we are often highly trained in the “Yes, but” mindset. Before a new idea even has a chance to breathe, we instinctively erect barriers to stop it.

Now, a “Yes, and” attitude does not mean we blindly agree with everything someone says. Even when we disagree with a specific proposal, we can choose to validate the feeling and the intention behind it.

Consider a family planning a milestone celebration. They find themselves stuck in a tense disagreement over the venue. One group wants it where family celebrations have *a/ways* taken place; the other wants a new spot with room for dancing. What if, instead of using power, stubbornness, or guilt to resolve the tension, they had an open

conversation about the values behind the choices? One group valued tradition and memory; the other valued joy and expression.

Listening with openness and without judgment to the heart of another person builds bridges of understanding. Ultimately, it leads to collaboration.

The Counter-Cultural Way of Christ

The Apostle Paul spent a great deal of time coaching early churches through their struggles. He was, in modern terms, a premier consultant on the path of faith. When he wrote to the church in Colossae—a church he didn't personally start—he did so to remind them of what truly mattered in their walk with Christ.

At the time, the Imperial Cult of Rome was booming. People were being subtly and overtly misled to believe that allegiance to the Empire—with its ways of violence, competition, and domination—was perfectly compatible with the way of Jesus.

But Paul's letter presents a beautiful, alternative worldview. In Colossians, wisdom is a central theme, but it is not the clever, sharp-edged wisdom of the world. It is the counter-cultural wisdom of Christ, where love and kindness reign supreme instead of dominance and oppression.

Here is a part of an overview of this letter from the Bible Project:

<https://youtu.be/pXTXIDxQsvc>

This young church was navigating what it meant to follow Jesus in a hostile environment. They needed practical instructions on how to remain faithful to the way of love. In Colossians 4:5-6, Paul gives them this golden rule of communication:

"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."

In the ancient Roman world, "outsiders" were routinely viewed as threats. Clear social divisions made people feel safe. Yet Paul instructs the Colossians to speak to these outsiders with grace and wisdom. Instead of arguing, dismissing, or conquering them in debate, they were to engage them with kindness.

Theologian Sylvia Keesmaat notes that the Colossians were surrounded by an imperial story which claimed that military violence is necessary for peace, that creation must be sacrificed for progress, and that relationships should serve imperial power. Paul challenges this narrative with the story of Jesus—a savior who brought peace not by inflicting violence, but by sacrificially bearing it.

The fear of the outsider is healed and transformed by Christ. The "outsider" can be anyone who feels like a threat to us, or anyone who simply thinks, votes, or lives differently than we do.

The brilliant Nigerian author Chimamanda Adichie speaks powerfully about this in her famous TED Talk, *"The Danger of a Single Story."* Her profound thesis is that we all carry different stories. We need to share them, and we need to honor the differences, recognizing the immense harm that happens when we imagine our story is the *only* story.

The Tools of Gracious Speech

To practice kindness in our conversations—especially when we feel challenged—we have to ditch the imperial, defensive mindset of "Yes, but" and embrace the open mindset of Christ.

What does this look like tomorrow morning? Author Rebekah Simon-Peter suggests we can develop our emotional intelligence through five practical, Christ-like abilities:

- **Self-Regulation:** Don't go to every fight you are invited to. When you feel your hackles rise or a biting retort forming on your tongue, breathe. Instead of cutting someone off, defuse the moment by saying, *"Tell me more."*
- **Empathy:** There is an old saying: *"Be kind. Everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle."* The cultural airwaves are full of negativity, making empathy more important than ever.

- **Self-Awareness:** Stay tuned into your own tendencies, your tiredness, and your need for time away. Recognizing your own exhaustion keeps you from projecting it onto others.
- **Motivation:** Deep down, people across the political and theological spectrums want similar things: safety, love, and the ability to live out their deepest values. We share these motivations; we simply differ on the methods to achieve them.
- **Social Skill (Leadership):** True leadership unifies. In a deeply divided world, you might not unite people around theology or politics. Instead, tap into our common treasury of values: the gospel, the love of God, and the Kingdom of heaven.

Conclusion: Becoming Kingdom Improv Artists

My friends, James 1:19 reminds us to be *"quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry."* This is the divine art of "Yes, and."

Think back to our opening exercise. When we live our lives in "Yes, but" mode, we act like the citizens of an empire. We guard our territory, we shut down neighbors, and we treat conversations as battlefields to be won.

But when we choose gracious speech—seasoned with salt, rooted in kindness—we become something beautiful. We become improv artists for the Kingdom of God.

When the world offers a story of brokenness, anger, and division, kindness allows us to look at our neighbor and say: *"I hear your pain... **and** I offer you grace."* *"I see our differences... **and** I choose to pull up a chair for you."*

This week, when the world invites you into a "Yes, but" argument, may you have the courage of Christ to offer a "Yes, and" blessing. Let us quietly, persistently, and lovingly bring people back to the overarching vision Jesus laid out for us. Let our words build the kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.