

Hey, this podcast episode is a “two-fer” topic. So what does that mean? Well, first, it’s one episode in a growing list of episodes already published in the “About” series—that’s where we profile a person who’s interesting and likely very valuable for us to think about and reflect upon. And second, in the case of the person in this episode...well, he was formally a worldwide ambassador of high effectiveness and renown—and we expect to have several episodes in the future *as to Christians being very effective ambassadors*.

What, you might be thinking? I’m not an ambassador in any way, shape, or form...and don’t intend to be! But the truth is, every Christian is called to be an ambassador for Christ...at all times! 2 Corinthians 5:20a (ESV) says this: “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.”

Whoa, did you hear that? Not only are believers truly “ambassadors for Christ,” God makes His appeal through us, too! Perhaps, then, we would do very well to take a short tour of the life of Vernon Walters, easily one of the most effective diplomats of the 20th century...or for all time, for that matter!

So, a man named Vernon Walters was an ambassador for the United States in the 20th century. And, quite frankly, he was almost universally admired and acclaimed, especially by the U.S. Presidents and world leaders he worked with over several decades. But let’s start with his beginnings and work to create a narrative of the impressive realities of Vernon Walters’ very impactful career.

Walters was born in 1917 in New York City to a British immigrant father in insurance sales. By age 6, the Walters family moved to Britain and France. Walters was educated at a Jesuit school but stopped his schooling at age 16, rejoining his dad to work in America as an insurance claims adjuster and investigator.

So, Vernon never attended college—nevertheless, he was clearly very bright. He spoke English as his native language, but He became fluent in French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Dutch, and Russian...all jump-started from his rubbing elbows with fellow students in his school years in Europe. And his skill set in languages was responsible for his entrée into doing so much of what came later in his career.

World War Two erupted, and Walters joined the U.S. Army in 1941, serving in Africa and Italy—ultimately being awarded military and intelligence medals. His language skill in Portuguese was put to use in a formal way even then, when he functioned in communications between the U.S. Fifth Army and the Brazilian Expeditionary Force.

By the time Vernon was in his early 30s—just a few years after the war—he was actually functioning as an aide and interpreter in Spanish and Portuguese for U.S. President Harry Truman in diplomatic meetings in Latin America. And a brief word about that is in order. Astute and accurate interpretation requiring mastery of two languages at the level of international diplomacy is well beyond the capabilities of the vast majority of people. Suffice it to say, real mastery is extremely essential in such important meetings.

Case in point. When I was hanging out with a missionary kid the other day—that is, the son of a missionary in Asia—he told me that his dad, early on, was having trouble mastering a tough language. Evidence of that? When he was trying to say “praise the Lord,” he was actually saying “praise the pig!”

Now, again, Walters was doing that high-level interpreting for U.S. Presidents while in his 30s...not just for Truman but after that, for President Dwight Eisenhower, too! And just where did he do that? At multiple crucial NATO summits where multiple languages were being spoken in the forging of likely the most important military alliance of many countries in the post-World War Two era! And Walters was also involved with the initialization of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers in Europe. Significant!

Then, during the 1960s and into the early 70s, Walters was a U.S. military attaché in Brazil, Italy, and France—yes, notably, France was where he arranged the smuggling of U.S. National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger for secret peace talks with North Vietnam...using the private plane of French President Georges Pompidou. He knew Pompidou from his being the translator for meetings between him and U.S. President Richard Nixon in 1970. Yeah, Walters was truly a go-to guy for leaders of the Free World!

After that, Walters was officially appointed to the spy world by Nixon, who appointed him as Deputy Director of the CIA, where he served several Directors of the CIA during very tumultuous times—and he himself actually was Acting Director for a turn! President Nixon was a true fan of Walters, dating all the way back to a very famous incident in 1958 in Venezuela where Vice President Nixon and Walters' car was directly attacked by an angry mob and Vernon's face was cut by the breaking glass. But Nixon wasn't hurt.

However, when Nixon's White House became embroiled in the Watergate scandal, Walters was asked to give the Nixon Administration cover for Watergate by claiming the affair to be a national security issue. Walters refused. When joining the CIA, he wrote in his autobiography, he would just retire to Florida "if anyone squeezed me too hard." That kind of integrity in government feels a bit rare, you think?

Then the 1980s. Early on, President Ronald Reagan tapped him to be his global ambassador-at-large and Walters proceeded to visit 108 countries! Few people can even name 108 countries, let alone visit them! But it sounds *just a bit preposterous* to have traveling ambassador responsibilities for the most powerful nation on earth to 108 sovereign nations! Unheard of before Walters...and really unheard of since!

After that stunning gig, Reagan appointed Walters to stay closer to home to connect with all those nations and more: the President named Walters U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, from 1985 to 1989! Then to top off his diplomatic career, Walters served as ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany from 1989 to 1991, representing U.S. interests as to the Unification Treaty to combine East and West Germany.

So, Vernon Walters served ten U.S. Presidents in sensitive, very difficult roles. Hey, is it any surprise that the Presidential Medal of Freedom was awarded to Vernon Walters in 1991 by President Bush? Yes, as the lifelong bachelor Walters famously said, he "married the U.S. government a long time ago."

Vernon Walters wrote an autobiography in 1978 titled *Silent Missions*. Then he published a second book in 2001 titled *The Mighty and the Meek*. There he ruminated about mighty Presidents, Prime Ministers, and Popes that he knew, literally dozens of the most powerful people on earth. But he also wrote eleven profiles of unknown, meek folks who touched him with their startling honesty, commitment, or dreams.

Two of his profiles of the meek especially stand out. The first was titled "God Willing, You Will." On one excursion, Walters and a Brazilian Colonel came across an entrepreneur named Cicero with a small but growing general store. Before leaving, Walters teased Cicero that he would find him in ten years with a 15-story building. The response? "Señor, God willing, you will." Then 25 years later, the Colonel was in the U.S. and Walters asked him if Cicero had a 15-story building. "No," the Colonel laughed, "but now he has three 5-story buildings." Walters wrote "*the optimist had been right after all.*" Yes: *God willing, you will.*

The second was a family, also in Brazil, who was working to translate the Bible into the local Cricati language. The husband told him it might take "perhaps my whole life." Walters wrote he was "stunned" that these missionaries were committed to such a task for maybe just 20,000 people or so. Walters gave the missionaries the canned goods he had with him and wrote that the words *perhaps my whole life* kept ringing in his ears. But you see, those translators were not just short-term ambassadors like Walters had so effectively been—instead, *they were expecting to be "lifers" in Brazil as ambassadors for Christ!*

So, what would we identify as a more key ambassadorship here: that of the mighty Vernon Walters or a meek family doing Bible translation for a mere 20,000 folks? Well, the answer is obvious to the believer: *those who do God's will in their everyday lives as an ambassador for Christ are most important.* But wait! God reveals His love and grace through effective ambassadors for Christ, no matter whether they're Bible translators, store greeters, business leaders, or U.S. ambassadors—vocation simply doesn't matter!

So, if you're digitally reaching folks for Christ in over 100 countries, similar to Walters reaching 100 nations for America—that's awesome! But no matter your vocation, if you connect to folks at your workplace or neighborhood in obedience to God as one of God's many appointed ambassadors for Christ—well, then you are what executing faithful ambassadorship for Christ is all about! *So...go be Christ's ambassador!*

A&A: Application & Action

1. Are you struck by the fact that likely the most effective diplomat in modern history, Vernon Walters, stopped his own schooling at age 16? Yet he was still universally admired by so many of the most famous and accomplished people of his life and times! Do we sometimes get formal education confused with effectiveness? Are you sometimes tempted to be overawed by someone with a doctorate? Do you think the missionaries in Brazil earned doctorates at a university? Ruminates on and discuss these intertwined themes.
2. How would you personally “position” Vernon Walters as compared to the Bible translators in Brazil as to the “right” impact in a lifetime of work? Be specific.
3. What would your colleagues at your workplace likely say about your being an “appealing” ambassador of Christ? Specifically, what about the “appealing” dimension? Specifically, what about the “ambassadors for Christ” dimension? Discuss.