

“Small, But Significant Things”

Colossians 4:2-6

Take your Bible this morning and turn with me to the fourth chapter of Colossians. I know we've been away from it the last few weeks, but I want to return to Colossians and finish up our study of this letter. And then in the coming weeks, I want to dive into the gospel of Mark.

The main idea that we've kept coming back to in this study of Colossians is that Jesus is sufficient. Christianity is not Jesus plus something else. To have Jesus is to have His life, and to know Jesus is to know God. We don't need any other additional experiences—Jesus is sufficient. That has been Paul's message throughout these four chapters. The first couple of chapters deal with our life in Christ. The last couple of chapters deal with our lifestyle as Christians. Life in Christ results in a changed lifestyle.

Paul provides us with a ‘checklist’ in which he identifies key markers of what can be called a magnetic faith. What does it mean to have a ‘magnetic’ faith? I'm talking about having a faith that is attractive to those who are on the outside, a faith that shines like a beacon in the night to those who are without hope. Paul is going to show us how our prayer life may be the best indicator of the condition of our spiritual walk. Now, it is easy to forget that this entire letter is written while Paul is chained to a Roman soldier at his side. We know that he is under house arrest. He cannot come and go like a free man, but is a prisoner of the Lord. He doesn't know what his future holds. And yet there is not one word of pity or protest. He doesn't even ask that they pray for him to be released. What he is concerned most about is for the gospel to be magnified in his life and amplified by his voice. Let's stand and read these verses together. (Read)

It has been said that we should never underestimate the power of small things. Things that are little in size, but not little in significance. I thought of a few illustrations about this to help solidify this truth in our minds. For instance, sometimes overlooking small things can lead to massive consequences. Maybe you've heard these lines before:

For want of a nail, the shoe was lost.

For want of a shoe, the horse was lost.

For want of a horse, the rider was lost.

For want of a rider, the battle was lost.

For want of a battle, the kingdom was lost,

And all for the want of a nail.

Or, small words that we speak may seem unimportant, but they may in fact change the entire course of our lives. Who can testify to the power of a small word of encouragement, or a small word of concern, spoken to you by someone at a time when you needed it the most? The little things matter. Those small actions and words can make a major impact. Little decisions made today that have a major impact on our lives tomorrow.

In the summer of 1806, five young college students at Williams College in Massachusetts gathered for what was meant to be a simple prayer meeting. When a thunderstorm came up, they took shelter under a haystack in a nearby field and continued praying. Their prayer was specific that God use their lives to bring the gospel to the nations. There was nothing dramatic about it. Yet that small prayer meeting ignited something far greater. Out of it came the very first foreign missions board, launching the modern missions movement in the United States. It sent missionaries to Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, and long-term influence on global Christianity still continues today. Historians can point to that

moment under a haystack as a turning point in American and global missions. What makes that story powerful is that no one present saw the impact at the time. It looked like a group of ordinary believers simply being faithful in prayer on an ordinary afternoon.

Zechariah 4:10—“Do not despise the day of small things.”

What are small, but significant things according to what the apostle Paul says in these verses? I want you to see three or four statements that he makes, things which are small, but very significant. First of all, he says:

1—Continue steadfastly in PRAYER (4:2-4)

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.”

Paul isn't asking the Colossians to make a big splash. He is not concerned that they level their collective bargaining influence and march on Rome. No, Paul asks the church to do something small, but something significant. He wants them to pray that God would open a door for the gospel to those on the outside. Paul understood the importance of prayer when it comes to doing the will of God, and he gives us here in these verses some very helpful instructions for a vibrant prayer life.

Faithful in prayer

Notice he says in verse 2, “Continue steadfastly in prayer.” It can also be translated, “devote yourselves to prayer.” It carries the idea that the entire congregation should devote themselves to persevering in prayer. Paul is calling

for the Colossian church to be a praying church. In many places in his letters, Paul calls the believers to prayer:

Romans 12:12—“Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.”

Ephesians 6:18—“Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.”

Philippians 4:6—“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

1 Thessalonians 5:17—“Pray without ceasing.”

1 Timothy 2:1-2—“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.”

When the Bible says to continue in prayer, or pray without ceasing, or in everything by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known, it is the idea of being God-conscious. It is the idea of keeping the Lord at the front of your mind, so that no matter what happens, you respond by taking it to God. You see a good thing, you thank God. You see a bad thing, you cry out to God on its behalf. It is a spiritually sensitive attitude.

When Paul says, “Continue steadfastly in prayer,” the root meaning of the word in the Greek means to be courageous and persistent. It means to hang in there and persevere in prayer until God does something. Part of the problem in our

prayer lives as Christians is that we quit too soon when we don't have any immediate answers.

Luke 18:1-8—“And He told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, ‘In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’ And the Lord said, ‘Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to His elect, who cry to Him day and night? Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?’”

The point is not that God is reluctant to hear and to answer prayer, but that we are too prone to quit. What we need is perseverance, praying with a burden until God moves, like Jacob in Genesis 32 wrestling with God and saying, “I will not let You go unless You bless me!”

Watchful in prayer

Paul wants them to continue steadfastly in prayer, and then goes on in verse 2, “Being watchful in it with thanksgiving.” To be watchful means to be alert. In Matthew 26:41, Jesus used this same word to encourage His sleeping disciples to “watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation.” It is a mindset that is alert and sensitive to the working of the Holy Spirit.

Notice the word ‘thanksgiving’ which has been a repeated theme throughout the letter. Prayer fosters gratitude, and gratitude feeds prayer. Truly thankful people

are prayerful people. Gratitude prompts the heart to pray and thank God for all His goodness in our lives.

Purposeful in prayer

What is the specific request that Paul makes? He wants a door to be opened. And not the door to the prison in which he was confined. Rather, he says, “Pray for me that God may open up a door for the word to declare the mystery of Christ.” More than anything else, Paul wants the church to pray that God would open a door of opportunity for the truth of the gospel to be declared. His mind was not on his own comfort or convenience. He isn’t concerned about his own sake, but for those who were without Christ. And he knows that the secret to an effective witness is prayer that is being made earnestly on his behalf.

Brian Hedges — *“Paul’s request shows us that prayer is the fulcrum for the Word, a divinely appointed means for leveraging God’s power in mission.”*

Prayer is small and overlooked, but it opens up doors of great opportunity. Kent Hughes tells the story of how the missionary leader Hudson Taylor observed that one of his missionaries in China was especially effective in reaching people for Christ. He sought to understand why, since many less successful missionaries were just as able and devoted as this leader. Then, one day in England, Taylor was approached by a man who asked about the missionary in question. The man had been his college roommate and had committed to praying daily for his work in the gospel. Taylor commented, “Then I knew the answer.”

Then notice a second ‘small, but significant’ thing that Paul mentions that is seen in verse 5 as he says:

2—Walk in wisdom toward OUTSIDERS (4:5a)

“Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.”

We pray for opportunities to make the gospel known to lost people, and then notice that he emphasizes how we need to be careful as we live our lives before lost people. Again, the little things in life matter—our words, our actions, and our attitudes.

Paul says in verse 5, “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders.” He’s referring to non-Christians. Believers are those on the inside. But those who are outsiders are lost. They don’t know our hymns. They don’t know our vocabulary. They don’t have clue what’s going on in here this morning. You live beside these folks every day. It may be that they talk in ways that you find offensive. They use language that you no longer use. And the temptation may be for you to try to reprimand them when we’re called to reach them. Which is why it is so important that we walk in wisdom toward those who are on the outside.

“Wisdom”—*translates the Greek word σοφία (sophia) which refers to the capacity to understand and function accordingly; the ability to discern what is right, true, and appropriate to the situation*

A person has wisdom when they understand and then put that understanding to use. To walk in wisdom means that you carefully guard your witness. It means we don’t give others ammunition to use against us.

(Illus. of Nathan confronting David in 2 Samuel 12:14)

Walking in wisdom toward outsiders means you don’t put lost people down because they don’t know what you know. You love people right where they are. You remember they are our mission field. Jesus came to make us fishers of men. But we want to clean the fish before we catch them. What people need is

a new heart that can only be given by the power of God. That's why in verse 4, Paul wants the church to pray for him specifically in this way—"that I may make it clear which is how I ought to speak." Paul is in prison for the sake of the gospel, his prison is going to be his pulpit, and he wants to communicate the message of Christ with clarity. And he wants these Colossian believers to have this same kind of witness. Rather than seeing people as obstacles, we need to see them as opportunities. Your wise walk can lead to someone else's conversion to faith.

Maybe you've read *The Cross and the Switchblade* by the evangelist David Wilkerson. Having been a young pastor from Pennsylvania, Wilkerson felt called by God to reach gang members in New York City. He met Nicky Cruz who was a violent leader of a gang in the city. He was feared for his brutality, involved in drugs, crime, and violence. By his own admission, he hated authority, despised religion, and was ready to kill anyone who challenged him. When Wilkerson first approached Cruz in 1958, Nicky threatened to kill him. Cruz famously said, "I'll cut you into a thousand pieces." Wilkerson's response was not fear or retaliation. He replied:

"You could cut me into a thousand pieces, and every piece would still say, 'Jesus loves you.'"

Wilkerson did not ignore Cruz's violence or excuse his sin. He simply loved him relentlessly, speaking truth, extending mercy, and refusing to give up—even after being mocked and threatened. Over time, Wilkerson's love dismantled Cruz's defenses. And in 1958, during a Teen Challenge rally, Cruz broke down publicly, surrendered his life to Christ, and experienced a dramatic conversion. Nicky Cruz went on to become an evangelist, traveling the world sharing his testimony. That's what it means to walk in wisdom toward outsiders. And you and I can do the same thing every single day.

The fact of the matter is that someone is always watching us, inspecting our actions, weighing our attitudes, listening to our words. Would they see enough evidence in our lives to convince them that we truly know the Lord?

Warren Wiersbe tells a powerful story to illustrate this from the life of William Henry Houghton, the early 20th century pastor. He writes:

Warren Wiersbe—“*When Dr. Houghton became pastor of the Baptist Tabernacle in Atlanta in 1925, a man in that city hired a private detective to follow Dr. Houghton and report on his conduct. After a few weeks, the detective was able to report to the man that Dr. Houghton’s life matched his preaching. As a result, that man became a Christian.*”

What if someone hired a private investigator to follow you around this week, to examine the consistency of your life to see if it lines up with what you claim to believe. Does your life match your preaching? Friends, that’s what it means to walk in wisdom toward outsiders. We must see to it that there is nothing in our lives that would hinder someone else from coming to faith in Jesus.

Then, a third ‘small, but significant’ thing Paul mentions is:

3—Make the best use of TIME (4:5b)

“*Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.*”

We’re to walk in wisdom toward outsiders, and notice Paul says, “Making the best use of the time.” Or, I like how the NLT translates it, “Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity.” J.B. Phillips paraphrases it this way, “Be wise in your behavior towards non-Christians, and make the best possible use of your time.” The word ‘time’ here is not *kronos*, from which we *chronology*, which means time in terms of clock time.

It is kairos, which means time in terms of its opportunity. It can be translated “redeeming every opportunity.”

Psalm 90:12—“So teach us to number our days that we may get our a heart of wisdom.”

Ephesians 5:15-16—“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time because the days are evil.”

To make the most of the time is really a matter of buying up opportunity. And let me tell you, opportunity is here one minute and gone the next. Life is short. Things change quickly. People are dying. You’re dying. Jesus is coming. What are you doing to cash in the time while you still have it? Don’t waste it, and don’t let it slip away.

J. Dwight Pentecost—“*To every man alike God grants a gift of twenty-four hours in any one day, not a moment more or less. What a man accomplishes in that twenty-four hour period is determined by the discipline that the man exercises in the use of time; one will exercise discipline and accomplish much, another will be undisciplined and accomplish little. One is approving things that excel, and the other is involved in things of lesser worth. That may apply to every realm of life.*”

James 4:14—“What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.”

The words of a poem express it well:

Life is just a minute—only 60 seconds in it.

Forced upon you—can't refuse it.

Didn't seek it—didn't choose it.

But it's up to you to use it.

You must suffer if you lose it.

Give an account if you abuse it.

Just a tiny, little minute,

But eternity is in it!

No matter your age, you'll always wish you had more time, or that you started younger. But today is the youngest that you'll ever be. Tomorrow, you'll be a day older. Don't put off until tomorrow those things that you should be engaged in today. And while you have the opportunity, you had better start now doing what's most important:

- Start reading your Bible
- Start praying
- Start going to church
- Start giving
- Start sharing Christ
- Start serving your family
- Start prioritizing the things that matter most

Redeem the time! Cash in the time, make the most of the time and opportunity that you've been given. Then notice one last thing as Paul says:

4—Let your speech be GRACIOUS (4:6)

"Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person."

Continuing steadfastly in prayer, walking in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of time. These are small, but significant things. And Paul isn't through. Notice he also says in verse 6, "Let your speech always be gracious." He emphasizes the importance of our words. How so?

Speech marked by kindness

He says, "Let your speech always be gracious." The word means that which affords joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness, charm, loveliness. It is referring to general conversation. A Christian's mouth should utter gracious speech. Back up in 3:8 he wrote, "Put away anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth." Never out of the mouth of a Christian should come deceit, cursing, oppression, lying, perversity, flattery, foolishness, idle talk, plotting, boasting, hatred, swearing, filthy talk, or gossip. That kind of stuff is characteristic of an unsaved mouth, not a Christian. Let your speech be always with grace. Make gracious speech a habit, whether you're being treated unfairly, whether it's a stress situation, whether it's difficulty, whether you've been wronged. Whether it's with your wife, whether it's with your children, your neighbor. Whatever it is, let your speech be gracious and kind.

Speech seasoned with wisdom

Notice verse 6 says that our speech must be "seasoned with salt." What in the world does that imply? Usually, 'salty' language is what we try to avoid! But here, Paul is saying that salty language is what we need to use. And what he means by that is impactful language, wholesome language.

Max Anders — *"In Paul's day, salt was used as a preservative to keep food from spoiling. This would mean the believer's speech is to be free from corruption, wholesome. Salt was used as an additive to give flavor to food. If this meaning*

lies behind the figure, then the believer's speech is to be interesting, witty, tactful, and appealing."

So the idea is language that is wholesome and appealing. We can't win other people to Christ simply by being kind and living as we should. At some point, we have to use our words to communicate the gospel. Perhaps you've heard a statement attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, "Preach the gospel, and when necessary, use words." But that's like saying, "Feed the hungry, and when necessary, use food." For it's always necessary to use words when preaching the gospel! Of course, we don't want our life to contradict the message of our lips.

1 Thessalonians 1:5—"Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake."

In other words, Paul says you saw that our manner of living didn't contradict the message we preached. Our words are to be marked by kindness, seasoned with wisdom, and he also says we should use:

Speech tailored to individuals

Paul says in verse 6, "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." You've got just the right answer for just the right time and just the right person. It is always answering every man who asks a reason for the hope that is in you, 1 Peter 3:15. Wisdom is knowing what to say to a person and when to say it.

Words are small, but significant things. Have you stopped to consider the weight of your words lately? Words are tiny vehicles by which we form sentences and

communicate. A word spoken at just the right time can prove to be life giving and instructive. A timely word is a precious thing. And the Bible says as much in many different places. For example:

Proverbs 25:11—“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.”

Proverbs 15:23—“To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!”

Proverbs 12:18—“There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”

Wisdom restrains speech until the moment is right. Words, when spoken wisely and timely, can mend what words that are spoken in haste would wound. I imagine that all of us can admit that we've been wounded by someone's words, and that we too have wounded others with our words. But Jesus often withheld words until the proper moment, and at other times He spoke decisively when silence would have been wrong. His words were never rushed, never late, and never careless. Each word that Jesus spoke was full of life and healing.

Matthew 5:2 says of Jesus, “And He opened His mouth and taught them.” Isn't that a great statement to describe the Lord?

John 6:63—“The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.”

Luke 4:22—“And all bore Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth.”

He opened His mouth and taught. He opened His mouth and spoke with grace. Luke 11:54 says that they were “laying wait for Him and seeking to catch

something out of His mouth that they might accuse Him.” Of course, they never ever were able to do it. 1 Peter 2:22 says of Jesus, “He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth.” James 3:2 says that we all stumble in many ways, and if anyone doesn’t stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. Jesus never made a mistake with His mouth, with something He said. And yet He went to the cross as our perfect sacrifice, laying down His life for us, paying the penalty for our sins. The invitation to life is now extended to every person who turns from their sin and trusts in Christ.

And so let’s remember that small things, overlooked things, are often significant things that lead to major impact.

- Continue steadfastly in prayer
- Walk in wisdom toward outsiders
- Make the best use of the time
- Let your speech always be gracious

Zechariah 4:10 says, “Do not despise the day of small things.” Things such as our walk and our talk. Our prayer life and our witness. Our conversation with others. These may seem insignificant to us, but they really are a big deal. Don’t forget about the small things. Friends, the little things can lead to large impact. And for those of you who feel the crushing weight of your sin, who recognize your need for salvation, it may seem like a small thing to repent and trust in Jesus. To simply believe on the Lord Jesus Christ may seem too small. The reality is that it is the most important decision a person can make. And coming to faith in Christ will result in a significant change in your life. So I implore you—come to Jesus now while there is still time!