Colossians 4:2-6 “Engaged Christians”

My title for my sermon today is, “Engaged Christians”. When I say this, I don’t mean engaged in the sense of being betrothed for marriage.

My sermon isn’t about talking about Christians who are in that stage before marriage.

Instead, when I say engaged, I mean “involved, busy, or occupied with something.”

Kind of like if I said, “the armies were engaged in battle” or “he is engaged in conversation”.

We all know what this can look like.

Two armies come to battle and start fighting. They are actively engaged in battle.

It’s Sunday afternoon and the TV is on. Dad is engaged in watching the Steelers play. It’s not easy to disengage him from that TV.

Mom is engaged in talking to her friend on the phone.

Or maybe your child is engaged in playing games. They are busy playing video games or playing with their friends.

When we say someone in engaged in something, we would say they are actively involved in an activity. They aren’t idle. They’re involved.

When we get to our text today, we see that Paul wants us to be engaged Christians. Not in TV, or talking on the phone, or playing games – but in the Christian life.

*READ COLOSSIANS 4:2-6*

Last week we talked through how our relationships need to be adjusted because of our reality in Christ.

All of chapter 3 was seeing how our life in Christ should change our life now.

As Paul wraps up his letter, he gives us some final instructions in order for us to be engaged Christians.

*I want you to notice 3 ways to be an engaged Christian. The first way is…*

**I. Devote to Prayer (2-4)**

When someone is devoted to something. They are committed to it. They are steadfast in it, and loyal to it.

I know someone who was devoted to going to yard sales every Saturday. They would not miss an opportunity to get a steal of a deal.

They went out rain or shine. Their devotion was seen in their commitment and faithfulness to yard saleing – is that even a word?

Paul calls us to be devoted to prayer, to be steadfast in prayer. To pray earnestly.

Why emphasize prayer? I believe it points backwards, but also forwards. It points forwards because we need prayer as we reach out to unbelievers.

But it also looks backwards and shows us the need for prayer as we live the Christian life.

As we set our minds on Christ, as we kill sin in our lives, as we put on Godly characteristics, and as we adjust our relationships – we need prayer.

Paul has this high view of prayer. By our lives, we frequently show that we have a low view of prayer.

We may pray for meals or pray when asked upon, but to call it a daily habit in our lives would be a stretch.

Prayer for Paul wasn’t just a little prayer before a meal or just an add-on item in a church service.

It was a daily, life-long activity of depending on God’s power to work.

Interestingly, we don’t forget to eat or sleep. Yet we forget to pray.

Food and sleep give us power to make it through the day, but we also need prayer because it is powerful.

Some of us get hangry when we don’t eat right on time or if we have to wait for our meal to come at the restaurant.

If you have never heard of hangry, it is when you are hungry and so then you become angry.

What if prayer was so much a part of our lives that it was like eating or sleeping?

God desires us to pray. He wants to give us good things. He wants to listen. He wants us to be on our knees in prayer.

When I am steadfast in prayer, then I am giving it constant attention and priority in my life. I am being persistent in prayer.

*How are we to pray?*

 **A. Pray in watchfulness and thankfulness**

They are to be watchful in their prayer. This reminds me of when Jesus said to his disciples, “Watch and pray.”

In the basic sense of the word, it means to stay awake. But I believe it has no more in mind in this verse.

Let’s say that I tell you to be watchful in how you use your time. What that means is that you will be careful not to waste time.

You will be alert and focused on using your time wisely. You will be attentive to anything that will take you away from your time.

So then watchfulness is about being alert and focused. When you are watchful, you are ready for danger or ready for anything to come.

When we are watchful in prayer, we are focused and we try to avoid distractions. We do what we can to stay at the task of praying.

Be alert to your common distractions and your bent for forgetfulness.

Also, be watchful in the reasons you are praying and your motives behind why you are praying.

And Paul says be watchful in prayer with thanksgiving.

Thankfulness is crucial to prayer. It helps us not make prayer into a selfish endeavor of asking for things all the time.

Imagine your child only coming to you and asking for things every day, but never thanks you for anything that you give.

That’s how we can tend to be with our prayers.

We have experienced God’s mercy, so we are to be thankful people. We thank Him for His grace in salvation, but also daily grace to sustain us.

When we are thankful in prayer, we are thankful for everything – even during the hard and sad times. We still see the blessings amidst the pain.

Are you being watchful and thankful in your prayer? Are you devoted and steadfast in it?

Is it a central part of your life, or just a small tagged on piece?

Be focused on it. Be alert to your tendency to neglect it. Be thankful in it.

*We are also to…*

 **B. Pray for other people’s opportunities**

As we go through life, it’s easy to get into the tendency of thinking just about our own lives. Or even just our family’s life.

It takes a conscious effort to think outside of ourselves and think about other people.

Paul asks that the Colossians pray for himself and his companions. This shows us that we should be praying for other people.

Specifically, here Paul shows us that we should pray for other’s opportunities.

He asks them to pray that God may open a door for the word, to declare the mystery of God.

This verse demonstrates that it is God who opens up opportunities for the Gospel. So we need to pray to him.

One clear example of this in my own life was in college. My professor emphasized this point of praying for opportunities.

So I started praying for opportunities to share the Gospel. Then not long afterwards, I had the opportunity to share the Gospel with a young woman.

It really opened my eyes to seeing the power of praying for opportunities and how we need to rely on God to open up doors.

Notice that Paul did not ask the Colossians to pray for his release from prison, but instead asked for prayer for opportunities.

Wow, that’s crazy! If we were in his spot, I think a lot of us would be asking for release, not opportunities.

God has to be the one to open up opportunities, but He also has to open up people’s hearts to hear the Gospel message.

We are engaged in spiritual work. God has to be involved! It is through His power that anything can happen with our engagement of those who are lost.

Paul also asks that they pray for clarity when he speaks. He ought to speak this way. But he needs prayer to do what he ought to do.

He displays to us that we not only need prayer for opportunities, but we need prayer for clarity when speaking in these opportunities.

So you may get occasions to speak the Gospel, but if you are not clear during those opportunities that doesn’t help lead people to Christ.

We need God’s help to be clear in sharing the Gospel.

The whole process of witnessing must be interwoven with prayer. We pray for instances to witness, God provides those instances and he softens hearts.

Then we pray for clear proclamation of the Gospel so that our words don’t get in the way of sharing the good news.

The Bible shows us that we are his instruments for declaring the salvation message with others. But in speaking it, it needs to be clear.

If we speak it and leave out repentance and it isn’t clear to the person what to do, that is not helpful.

That’s why clarity is so important. But we see the solution to our inclination to be unclear, and its prayer.

Rely on God for opportunities and clarity. But also, pray for other’s opportunities.

Pray for our missionaries. Pray for other Christians. Pray that the Gospel would go forth.

You are tapping into God’s amazing power! Prayer has power because it is connected to the ultimate generator of power - God.

Do you recognize the power of prayer?

*So we saw the need to be devoted to prayer, let’s see what else Paul shows us…*

**II. Demonstrate Wise Living (5)**

We all know what unwise living looks like. It looks like someone who has reckless spending. It looks like someone making bad choices.

It is seen in how you talk to other people. It is seen in how you act around other people. The whole book of Proverbs is pushing us to wise living.

As a Christian, you can either live wisely around unbelievers or not.

I believe that Paul adds in these verses about how to live around unbelievers here because a lot of the book of Colossians was talking about staying away from false teaching.

Here, Paul is saying that we should not completely avoid the unsaved. We should instead, live wisely around them.

The Christian life is one of engagement, not isolation.

We don’t burrow into our churches and homes and avoid other people who are not believers. We live among them.

We should be interacting with them. You should want opportunities to spend time with those who don’t believe.

It’s fascinating that a lot of times we don’t hear these verses preached on. We don’t hear these instructions thought through.

I believe a lot of it is because we are nervous about compromising.

We think, “well, you don’t want your life to be influenced.” Well yes, we should be careful not be influenced, but we should also be among people.

Look at Christ who ate with sinners. He spent time with them, but He wasn’t influenced by them. He is our perfect Example.

Paul shows us the need to live wisely around the unsaved.

*So if this is true, how should we act and speak around them? You should first…*

 **A. Use your conduct wisely**

Wisdom involves taking God’s truth and principles from God’s Word and applying it to specific situations.

So whatever situation we are in, we use wisdom in knowing how to live. Not every scenario will be the same.

It takes wisdom to determine how to act. You take the various factors at play into account and decide what to do.

I think that’s why Paul doesn’t give specifics here. Because every situation will be different.

Using your conduct wisely means you know how to be all things to all people without compromising.

You can relate to people without being sinful or unfaithful to God.

You are careful not to needlessly offend them and turn them away.

You don’t want to be a stumbling block to someone coming to Christ. We should walk in wisdom around them.

Take time to think about what is considered rude and offensive behavior.

So that means you don’t walk up to someone already talking to someone else and say, “Where do you think you will go when you die?”

You’re not walking in wisdom; you are being rude by interrupting a conversation.

Your lifestyle should match your words. If you want them to grasp the Gospel, don’t you think you should live a life that displays the Gospel?

If we are lazy, don’t pay our bills, or we are mean and nasty – how does that make the Gospel look appealing?

By our lives we can either provide a clear path for the Gospel or we can put up a barrier to it.

I’ve noticed that skeptics are more open to someone sharing the Gospel with them that they know and respect because of the way they live.

How is your conduct around those who are unsaved? Do you avoid them at all costs? Do you act weirdly when they are around?

Or do you live as one changed by the Gospel, and use wisdom in how to live in each situation?

*We are also to…*

 **B. Use your time wisely**

It’s not fun to waste an opportunity. Atari founder, Nolan Bushnell, turned down the opportunity to invest $50,000 in Apple.

Had Bushnell said yes, he would have owned a third of Apple, a company that is today valued at about $830 billion.

At the time of any missed opportunity, we usually don’t realize the importance of the opportunity.

It’s usually not until later that we realize that we really should have taken that occasion that presented itself to us.

Paul doesn’t want us to feel that way. He doesn’t want us to miss opportunities that present themselves.

So not only should we pray for and desire opportunities, we shouldn’t waste them either.

Paul uses a remarkable phrase here in verse 5. The word actually means to “buy up the time”.

Our translations usually say, “make the best use of the time” or “redeeming the time”. And that is the picture here.

Make the most of the time given. Make the most of every opportunity.

Whenever you have chances to share the Gospel with someone, use it! Don’t waste it. Make the most of it.

I feel like we all have missed chances to witness for Christ.

But when you truly understand the seriousness of their need to respond to the Gospel and that time is short, it pushes you to share the Gospel.

If they don’t hear and respond to the Gospel, they will be headed towards an eternity separated from God.

Using your conduct wisely and using your time wisely demonstrates wise living.

It shows that I am intentional about living among the unsaved. I’m not going to put a stumbling block in the way and I am not going to waste opportunities.

Wisdom knows how to act around unbelievers and wisdom knows that it cannot squander chances for Gospel witness.

*And wisdom also knows how to speak with those who are lost. So we are to…*

**III. Display Gracious Speech (6)**

Imagine someone who is unforgiving and unkind in their words. They hold grudges against people and speak nasty words about them.

Imagine that they desire grace for their mistakes, but they withhold grace when someone else hurts them.

Their speech is often insensitive, harsh, and unloving. That person wouldn’t picture Christ or the Gospel. Their speech is certainly not gracious.

Paul doesn’t want us to be like that. He wants us to always be gracious in our speech. It should be a consistent characteristic of your conversations.

Our speech should constantly be: loving, patient, kind, thoughtful, and sensitive, especially when interacting with unbelievers.

We speak the truth in love. Meaning, we don’t shy away from proclaiming the hard truths of the Bible.

But we also speak of those truth in loving ways.

We shouldn’t go up to an unbeliever and the first thing we say is that we tell them that they need to get their life together. They need the Gospel!

People will notice your speech if it is always with grace. They will see that you are different. You should use your words to build up, not tear down.

*Our speech should also be…*

 **A. Attractive speech**

We read that our speech should be seasoned with salt. Obviously this isn’t literal, it is pointing to a deeper truth.

Salt was very commonly used during this time to add flavor and prevent from spoiling.

So what I believe Paul is saying is that our speech should be appealing and profitable.

It should be lively, interesting, stimulating, enjoyable, and wise. The unsaved person should enjoy talking to us.

They shouldn’t think: “oh here comes this guy, he is so boring and uninteresting!”

We should be able to hold our own in social settings. When you speak, get people’s minds thinking.

Ask stimulating questions. State interesting things about the Gospel. Use wisdom. Make your conversations enjoyable, not unbearable.

Imagine a Christian talking to an unbeliever. The Christian starts talking about the Bible and the Gospel.

But when he is talking, he is making the Gospel sound very unappealing and boring. They aren’t excited about what they are talking about.

They act as though it’s just kind of a thing that they do. They emphasize the fact that they have to abide by these certain rules.

This is what Paul is teaching against. He doesn’t want us to speak of the Gospel in boring and unattractive ways.

He wants us to make the Gospel look attractive. Now the Gospel is attractive in itself, it is not boring or unattractive, but the presenter can detract from that.

Think about someone sharing about an upcoming event. The event in itself is not boring, but the person can make it sound boring.

The person could say, “You know we have this event coming up, and I guess we will get together and just kinda do some stuff.”

Now imagine another person talk about the same event. “Guys, we have an event coming next week and it’s going to be amazing!”

“We are going to have food, and games, and prizes. There will be a musical group coming and it’s going to be a blast!”

There’s a big difference in how those two people presented the same event. That’s what we can do with the Gospel.

We have the most amazing good news in the Gospel. Let’s act like it! Let your speech be seasoned with salt.

Don’t let it be bland, let it be enhanced with flavor.

*Our speech should be attractive, but also…*

 **B. Purposeful speech**

If you realize how Jesus spoke to people in the Gospels, you see that he spoke differently with different people.

He talked differently to the woman at the well than he did with Nicodemus, a Pharisee. He was very purposeful.

This wise living and gracious speech is for a purpose. So that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

In this statement, there is an implication that unbelievers will be asking questions of us.

All of our answers must be done in a wise and gracious manner.

No matter what they ask, we should provide an appealing, wise, and thought through answer.

Now sometimes off the top of your head you won’t know an answer. So get back to them. Go study and tell them later.

Peter also shows us in 1 Peter 3:15, that when we answer people we do so in a gentle and respectful way.

What we say is important, but we also see that how we say things matter to God.

Could your speech be characterized as gracious? What about attractive and purposeful?

Does your speech look like Christ’s or does it look more like the world’s?

Be like the one who was full of grace and truth, Jesus Christ.

In all of this, we are to..**Be engaged in intentional prayer and wise witness.**

We sure need prayer and wisdom to live and talk this way. We need prayer for opportunities.

Be intentional in your prayer life. Continue steadfast in it, being watchful and thankful. Pray for other people as well.

As we have looked at Paul’s instructions for us, we have noticed that he instructs us to be engaged Christians.

Our lives cannot be disengaged and isolated. They must be active. We must be out and about talking with those who are lost.

Be engaged in conversation with God through prayer and be engaged in conversation with unbelievers.

We should have this vibrant testimony. A testimony that exhibits itself in every part of our lives.

A testimony that pushes us to pray, but also a testimony that reflects the Gospel.

Our lives and speech are both impacted by it. We are living in wise ways and we are gracious in our speech.

How is your life lately? Are you engaged in intentional prayer? Are your life and speech replicating Christ’s?

Are you yourself excited about the Gospel? Are you convinced of prayer’s power?

If not, maybe it’s time to stop being disengaged and isolated. Let the Gospel change you.

I think of those two people who talked about the same event in two different ways.

The difference was their own excitement about the event. One was excited to tell others about it and the other was not and it made a difference.

Maybe that’s our problem. Maybe that’s why we are not engaged in telling others about Christ or prayer. Because we ourselves are not excited or passionate about the Gospel.

Perhaps that’s where we should start.