

## An (Extra)Ordinary Family

Colossians 4:2-6

[2] Sometimes, when i sit still for long enough... i recognize that living in America is exhausting. Seriously! We live in an achievement culture - those of you in the workplace know this more intimately than I do.

NY Times columnist David Brooks provides some commentary on this cultural phenomenon - and it's pretty striking. For Instance - In 1950, Gallup polled HS seniors and asked if they were an important person. 12% said yes. In 2005, 80% said yes. What might the response be now, 10 years later? We have geared our kids to believe that the extraordinary, the superlative, the BEST, the important, is normal. Everyone is special, and you've got to work harder than the next person to maintain that, right?

well how does this play out in the long run? what does this look like over the course of a lifetime? Brooks suggests that our secular culture KNOWS that eulogy virtues are more important, but we spend our time on resume virtues. We know that we can't take it with us... but we want to stack it up on our resume and have a nicer house than the neighbors in the meantime.

Competition is so intense in some areas of life that there is very little time to actually sit still. You should be maintaining your yard, making an impression at work, getting likes on FB, re-pins on Pinterest, brand yourself, market yourself... and does that leave any time for rest? for Sabbath? for just having an ordinary day?

Popular media is great at reinforcing this in ways that we otherwise might not catch - we DESERVE the best, because we're special, right? We lift up celebrities as ideal, special people, when they are actually as ordinary as we are... but culturally, they are set apart and if we want to be happy, we should be like them.

And keeping up with celebrity culture is impossible. Celebrities can't even do it. 50cent is not even worth that right now. Even keeping up with that other family in your neighborhood might be exhausting.

This cultural "achievement obsession" actually affects OUR culture, as the CHURCH, as well.

We end up comparing our spiritual walk with our neighbor or our friends, and feel like maybe we should have more spiritual facebook posts, or if we just tried to pray more we could look like we have peace, like them...

And within Church culture, the "achievement" or "extraordinary" thrust of pop culture causes us to lift up missionaries and full-time ministers as our own celebrities, and we get caught up in the lie that the only thing that's "worth something" to God is the spiritual STUFF we do.

SO... There are some days that I come to worship exhausted. and not because we've got 2 toddlers and an infant to load up... it's sometimes because I'VE believed the rhetoric of AMERICAN Christianity, that i need to be living a radical, extreme, on fire, sold out, totes awesome, always extraordinary life for Jesus.

but that's not the gospel.

i've been crucified with Christ and it's no longer I, but Christ who lives in me. And the life i know live, i live by FAITH in the Son of God - not faith in my achievements.

Jesus already accomplished FOR me what I could NEVER do by trying to be good enough. And after He went to be with God the Father and prepare a place for us, he left the Holy Spirit to empower us to do things in RESPONSE to His love for us, NOT to earn it.

and here's where the Bible speaks directly to those cultural lies - we were not called to live extraordinary, radicalized, extreme lifestyles as Christians - we are called to live in this world, but not be in love with it. We are called to live abundantly in our normal, mundane lives.

This morning, I specifically want to challenge the assumption that many of us hold, that causes us so much guilt, that Jesus never put on us - that we must by our OWN efforts be extraordinary, radical people all the time, everywhere.

I owe a great deal of insight to Michael Horton's book - Ordinary - in which he quotes from a recent blog post from a foreign missionary and self-proclaimed "radical" follower of Jesus, who returned to live an "ordinary life" in the states. Here's what she said about these assumptions:

*Now, i'm a thirty-something with two kids living in a more or less ordinary life. And what i'm slowly realizing is that, for me, being in the house all day with a baby and a two-year-old is a lot more scary and a lot harder than being in a war-torn african village.*

*[3] What i need courage for is the ordinary, the daily everydayness of life. Caring for a homeless kid is a lot more thrilling to me than listening well to the people in my home. Giving away clothes and seeking out edgy Christian communities requires less of me than being kind to my husband on an average wednesday morning or calling my mother back when I don't feel like it.*

*She continues: I've come to the point where I'm not sure anymore just what God counts as radical. And I suspect that for me, getting up and doing dishes when I'm short on sleep and patience is far more costly and necessitates more of a revolution in my heart than some of the more outwardly risky ways I've lived in the past. And so this is what I need now: the courage to face an ordinary day without despair, the bravery it takes to believe that a small life is still a meaningful life, and*

*[4] the grace to know that even when I've done nothing that is bold or even interesting that the Lord notices me, and is fond of me, and that is enough.*

That's an ordinary testimony of the gospel.

[5] Horton clarifies, that ordinary does not mean mediocre. Embracing "ordinary" is not a call to do less, but a call to invest in things that we often give up on when we don't see immediate return. Eulogy virtues, not resume virtues.

what a sobering word. and an encouraging word for all the moms who know exactly how that blogger feels! and hopefully now you're thinking, "well, what AM I supposed to do?"

[6] This morning, we'll be looking at Paul's letter to the church at Colossae. When Paul wrote his letters to encourage pastors, elders, and local churches, he wasn't necessarily writing to extreme, on fire, sold out, radical people - he was writing to ordinary people.

The gospel is for ordinary people, living normal lives.

with that encouragement in mind, let's look at the context of Colossians, in order to get into our text for this morning.

[7] The Context - the who/when/why - is that Paul addressed this letter to the local church at Colossae, while he was imprisoned in Ephesus. This was probably written around the same time as the letters of Ephesians and Philemon, in the mid to late 50's AD. 20 years after Jesus has been raised, and the church is spreading all around the Mediterranean.

The most important question to ask when you are digging into a book of the Bible is WHY - so why did God lead Paul to write this letter? It seems that in large part, since Paul had never been to Colossae and hadn't had the chance to teach them di-

rectly about Jesus, he wrote this letter in order to address a false philosophy or worldview that had begun to affect the Colossian church...

Even though that's a specific reason for Paul to write to Colossae, that's a pretty specific reason for God to preserve that same word for US, RIGHT NOW. In every era, in every part of the world, the Church, the people of God, will encounter false worldviews. A culture that operates on false premises.

Sometimes a false worldview could be the “spiritual, but not religious” way of life. A form of seeking God that isn't focused on Jesus, necessarily. In some areas today, this is the trendy way to believe/understand how the world works. There is a God, but we can only know Him inwardly, subjectively.

sometimes the church, especially new or young believers, are influenced more than they know by the ‘spirit of the age.’ This is in part why Paul responds to them with such timeless language about Jesus - He is not changed by the spirit of the age.

[8-9] Colossians 1 - He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

this letter is written to an ordinary group of believers, encouraging them to live in the REALITY of the gospel - the reality of who Jesus is, how he has reconciled us to God, and what it means to live like it's all true.

Brad set me up last week by mentioned the term Chiasm or Chiastic structure off the cuff when he was preaching from Titus. One of the things I love about Pastor Brad is that he is always learning - he mentioned to me last week that he's SO glad me and Ricky are in our respective programs, because HE gets to learn so much, vicariously. I thought he was going to say he was proud of us or something... just kidding! Brad loves to learn, and he's always asking about what we're studying, so we had a conversation about an aspect of interpreting the new testament that we both found fascinating.

[10] to do GOOD interpretation - or hermeneutics - to read the Bible deeply and well, what kinds of things do you need to consider? We talked already about context, and that's a key part of it. There are three contexts, or groups of folks to remember, when interpreting Scripture - The author, the author's original audience, and YOU, the reader. We're going to practice that this morning as we unpack Colossians 4:2-6.

The author is Paul, and Paul is writing in Greek. Some of you are thinking, of course, get to the good stuff, i know this already, and some of you are thinking, wait, what about King James English? Unfortunately, that is not the original language. And Greek, when it is written, looks a lot differently than English...

for instance, on my powerpoint and in the manuscript i'm using in typed, 21st century English, I can use BOLD, Italics, paragraph separation, and even punctuation. in Greek, there is NONE of that, not even punctuation.

So you may be wondering, what does that look like? Here's an example, using English.

[11]

This, quite simply, is a sentence in English.

THISUNFORTUNATELYISASENTECEINGREEK

some of you actually can read this pretty well, because you're used to Hashtags.

[12] #bestsermonever

For our resident Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter users, they're used to reading giant run-on words that begin with the tictactoe symbol. And actually, in our next sermon series, we're going to encourage you social media folks to engage using a hashtag, to be determined.

[13] so how does a writer in Greek emphasize a point? How does Paul make things really stand out if it all runs together like that? One tool is Chiasm. notice how this breaks down

A - B - C - C - B - A

This allows you to say something twice, with a pivot point in the middle. The repetition also catches those who are only hearing, since many were not yet literate in the world when the scriptures were written. When you hear something twice, you're twice as likely to remember it. How about that math.

What Brad and I found interesting is that all of Colossians is a chiasm! the whole letter can be broken down this way... though you need more than 3 letters to structure it. this allows Paul to reiterate things, to make BOLD typefaced statements, to emphasize truth in his writing.

[14] Colossians 4:2-6 falls toward the end of the chiasm, reiterating points made in chapter 2. Let's stand together as I read the text.

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.

Walk in Wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech be seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

The Word of God for the people of God - thanks be to God

Remember the Colossian believers, the original audience for this letter - ordinary people, affected by the spirit of the age, a minority in their community.

That actually sounds like us, as well. Ordinary believers wrestling with a culture that is constantly swayed by its passions in ways that we don't always understand and certainly can't agree with... and becoming a minority in our community.

In Colossae, this was ok - they'd never known the privilege of being the majority, of having political power, of having monetary wealth. The word for us in this truth is that as the people of God, we have always been a minority, globally, and that's ok. Throughout the history of the church, those who follow Jesus have been more frequently in the minority than the majority - what a privilege we have had in America in the last 200 years! But should we just presume on that privilege? Should we just take for granted what God has allowed for us? And should we now complain if the spirit of the age is merely becoming apparent?

our text directly answers this, in terms of our response to those outside the Church family.

For the Colossians, the line between insider, or follower of Jesus, and outsider was a lot less blurry. It was pretty evident if someone had never heard the name of Jesus before. Here and now, we are instead dealing with a much blurrier line, a potentially more complicated context, because so many people assume they know who Jesus is. They assume they are Christian even, for being born in the South. But if they don't KNOW Jesus, if they haven't been reshaped by the gospel, they may be on the outside, as it were.

Paul wants to equip the ordinary folks to engage with those who are outside, and this is his instruction to them.

Verses 2-4 can be understood as Speaking to God about people.

### **[15] Continue in Prayer**

what does continuing in prayer imply? that they started in prayer! Any hope we have of living an abundant, ordinary life, is tied to how we communicate with God. Any hope we have of engaging lost people around us necessitates that we've already talked to God about what's going on in life.

we must be communicating with God before communicating with those outside - otherwise, who would we be introducing them to? An abstract concept of the Divine? A deity who is unapproachable and far from us? We have been rescued by a God who has made us SONS and DAUGHTERS, who invites us to fellowship at His Table, who is knowable, through the person of Jesus. Talk to him, like a person.

### **[16] Open up a door, to declare the gospel - CLEARLY**

open doors - we can easily recognize this phrase, but I wonder how easily we actually recognize the open doors.

This is a simple, yet profound, way to pray for one another. All of us know people who either haven't heard about Christ, or haven't heard it clearly, and a simple, powerful way to pray for one another is to do this. Ordinary people encounter open doors all the time, in the course of ordinary days, so pray also that we would each be aware of these open doors!

Paul uses the phrase "the mystery of Christ" - the mystery of What is Going ON in the World has been revealed in Jesus -

and we should speak of this with simple clarity. There are still aspects of the gospel that are mysterious, but the fact that DEATH is DEFEATED because JESUS is ALIVE is worth proclaiming clearly and often, isn't it?

Paul builds on this idea of speaking "clearly," as he ought to, in the next two verses, which could be seen as

Verses 5-6 - Speaking to people about God

### **[17] Walk in Wisdom**

Paul tells us in Galatians to walk "in step" with the Spirit, and in that way bear the fruit of the Spirit. Here we are to walk in Wisdom, and Paul unpacks what that might mean in the following verse.

### **[18] i want us to consider the phrase, toward outsiders, though**

as i mentioned, the lines are blurry here in the Bible belt. no one wants to be an "outsider," and it's probably offensive to some to even use that term. so part of the walking in wisdom would be to know when and when not to use that kind of term. If you're an "outsider" this morning, someone who is still considering Jesus or trying to get a sense of what a Church community is like, we are humbled that you are here and welcome you wholeheartedly. Just as God has torn down the dividing wall of hostility between us and Him, we want to tear down any walls that would keep us from fellowship in the gospel, so please take time to ask any of our elders or the person who brought you, or the person sitting next to you whoever they are, about Jesus.

generally speaking, though, we encounter outsiders outside - in the workplace, in our families, in our neighborhoods -

Hear this: the reputation of the Gospel is tied to the actions and words of believers. Not the POWER, but the reputation of the gospel is tied to the actions and words of believers. As much as we wish it were simply tied to Jesus and the Scripture, there are people who may never read Jesus' words, but they hear what you say. They may not have read the Scripture, but they read what you post on Facebook. They may not be familiar with what Gospel-centered grief looks like, but they see how you mourn the death of believers.

And THIS is where the phrase making the best use of the time comes into play

### **[19] making the best use of the time**

Depending on your translation it may read redeem the time, make the best use of the time, spend the time wisely... and it would be SO easy to use this phrase to induce guilt.

“Have you been making the best use of the time?” What does this presume? We have to understand what BEST USE even means!

If we're driven by our culture's values, then the BEST USE would be to spend our time achieving something measurable, or to make the best use means to have success of some sort. The culture's best use of time is use that causes immediate gratification.

But God does not presume those things. God does not have those expectations for our time, but rather he expects us to do

justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with Him and with others. He expects us to love Him with all that we are and love the other as we love ourselves.

this is not a radical description. that's a description of the ordinary Christian life.

So here are a couple things we get from this phrase in the context of this passage - 1, the best use of the time is living out the greatest commandment and the second commandment in whatever circumstance you're in. That could be going to lunch after service. That could be telling your boss you need more hours. That could be hugging your neighbor who just found out they have cancer. The BEST USE is wrapped up in what Jesus has simply, clearly told us.

2, make the best use of the time you are IN. If you're constantly dreaming about what's next, or hung up on what's come before or what's in your past, you can't make the best use of your time - you must be PRESENT in it in order to make the best use. When you are PRESENT, you can see the open doors.

Don't let anyone guilt you into thinking the 'best use of the time' is necessarily spent in a radical way.

## **[20] Gracious, Salty Language**

Let your speech be seasoned with salt... Salty language. we have different cultural connotations to that phrase, don't we?

this actually refers to wit, humor, and creativity. Paul is literally telling people, hey, be winsome. Be interesting to talk to. Be engaging in conversation!

What I love about this idea is that it again presumes something... being creative and humourous in conversation means KNOWING who you are talking to. When you really know someone, you can get their jokes, and you know how to make them smile as well. It's pretty embarrassing to try to be humorous and creative with people you've just met, say on a first date. Few things are more awkward than saying something that should be hilarious and getting no response... many preachers understand that one.

### **[21] Answer each person**

The seasoning of language phrase is not on its own, however, but instead is for the purpose of providing an answer to each person.

Some translations say "every" person, but that's not the best interpretation - and frankly, it's overwhelming. Trying to think of how I can answer EVERY person I come across, when I look at my calendar and consider my schedule, is just too much. Considering EACH, individual, person I encounter... that is more manageable. I can get my mind around that.

Clearly, this passage is intended to encourage our evangelism, our sharing of the gospel clearly when we have open doors.

I want to suggest that there are two ways to consider evangelism for ordinary folks like us.

[22] first, there is Direct Evangelism - unless you're gifted by the Spirit for evangelism, nonstop direct evangelism is exhausting. In the New Testament, evangelism is listed as a gift of the Holy Spirit, and you probably know someone who is

gifted like this. They are always leading conversations with unbelievers, fearlessly asking, “what do you think about Jesus?” Praise God for those He has gifted and put in the church body to encourage all of us in evangelism.

The second way to consider it is Responsive Evangelism - every believer is being equipped to respond. I believe that THIS is “making the best use of the time,” when we engage in responsive evangelism, responding with our friends, coworkers, and neighbors, to the things in life that God allows.

David Brooks also provides some helpful thoughts toward responsive evangelism. There is something that EVERY person who lives, whether Christian or not, will experience - suffering. Everyone knows suffering, to some degree or another, even if they appear to have it all together - sometimes those folks have it worse than you’ll ever know.

[23] A way we can do responsive evangelism using the common denominator of suffering is in HOW we live through our own suffering, how we respond to suffering. John Piper has a book, Don’t Waste Your Suffering - and that’s a great reminder - you can share the gospel with your family and your coworkers in HOW YOU SUFFER.

Our American, achievement culture causes us to aim for happiness - we think we have the right to BE Happy... when it’s really the right to pursue happiness. We always aim for happiness, but it’s really the suffering we experience that makes us who we are. Suffering outside of the gospel is just dehumanizing, crushing, despair - but suffering with HOPE, it shapes you.

We can make the best use of the time by responding with hope and love to the ordinary suffering of our family and neighbors and coworkers. It's ordinary in that EVERYone knows it. Suffering is not special, in that sense.

Some common experiences in the midst of suffering that we can RESPOND to with the gospel:

suffering shatters the illusion of self-mastery... it's out of control. According to the Gospel, that's ok - God is in control.

Suffering teaches gratitude - you become thankful for the little things that sustain you. How much MORE thankful are we when our church family comes alongside us in suffering, how much MORE gratitude do we feel when we consider what Christ suffered FOR us.

People don't heal from suffering - they come out changed. You can share the power of the gospel by letting the GOSPEL change you in your suffering.

[24] another common denominator that allows for responsive evangelism - all people experience Grace - whether common grace or special grace. God is gracious to all with the rain, with the sunshine... God is especially gracious to His children, who have responded in faith and repentance. You can talk about "grace" and you can talk about things that you have received that you didn't deserve, because almost everyone knows at least a measure of what that feels like.

[25] everyone is born with a moral imagination, or a conscience - there's a hunger, or a God-shaped hole (Pascal) that goes unarticulated until you hear the Gospel. The story of God

gives context to this idea of good and evil, this hunger to know what's out there... and EVERYone has that hunger. God might open a door for you to respond to someone experiencing that longing.

So how are ordinary Christians to live? This text in Colossians speaks to our interaction with those outside, and Paul actually gives even more practical advice for ordinary Christian living in Titus 3, the followup to what Brad preached last week.

As we close, hear the Word of the Lord and consider how you might rest in Jesus' finished work, respond with grace and salty speech to those who need to know Jesus, and live an abundant, ordinary life in the gospel.

[26-27] Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.