

Go: Love Your Neighbor, A Lifestyle of Intentionality, Colossians 4:5-6, 4/21/24

My dad is absolutely obsessed with the Philadelphia Eagles. They are my team as well, but my dad is a superfan. We don't have to ask him what he wants for Christmas or Birthday, it's birds gear. In fact, you can ask my wife and kids if you think I'm exaggerating- he exclusively wears Eagles gear. He loves to talk about them with anyone who will listen, even half-heartedly listen, and he has developed creative ways to bring the Eagles into the conversation. I'm talking about how I had to fly out to a conference, "Speaking of flying...did you see who the birds picked up in a trade?" My brothers and I take bets when we are out in social places with my dad how long it will take until he is talking Eagles with a complete stranger.

While he's extreme, there is a basic principle at play with my dad, which is that **we share what we love**. When we love something or someone we want to let other people in on what we love. That's how we are wired by God. For some of us that's movies or music, or our pets, or our spouse or kids, for Pastor Matthew some nerdy Star Trek convention...We share what we love.

For the last two weeks of our series we've been talking about what it looks like to aim our lives at the greatest commandment of Jesus from **Matthew 22:37-39 "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself."** Love God and people. So here's my basic argument for today's message: **When we love God, we share Him with the people we aspire to love.** Loving God and sharing him with others goes together like coffee and cream. This is why the Great Command and the Great Commission (To go and share the gospel with everyone) always go together. Loving God and sharing Him with others is built into what it means to be a follower of Jesus, and it comes from the mouth of our Lord. And this is also good to know if you are here and you aren't a Christian in order to understand why some of the Christians you know, maybe even the ones who invited you here today, seem to talk about God and Jesus and faith a lot...One because we share what we love, but because we have a faith that was designed to be shared, not be kept to ourselves.

Blank Slide Now while the logic makes sense that if we love God we will share him with people, we are socially conditioned from a young age to keep our mouths shut about religion, God, especially the gospel of Jesus. We are told that faith is a private, not public matter, it can be offensive. After all, "Who are you to tell me what you think is true?" That's the modern secular sentiment today.

John Mark Comer in his new book *Practicing the Way* points out the irony of this, **"Everyone is sharing a gospel of some kind.** The question is not 'Are you sharing the gospel?' It is 'What gospel are you sharing?' The gospel of third wave anti-racism? Or of LGBTQIA+ pride? Or Democratic Socialism? Or American nationalism? Or free market capitalism? Or cold-water therapy or intermittent fasting or mindfulness or new wave psychedelics? **All of these gospels are messages about how we should live, where our hopes lie, where human history is going, what the dangers are, how to find salvation, where to find community or how to be a good person.**

Everyone is sharing a gospel, it's just that Christians are sharing the gospel of Jesus." All we are doing is sharing what and who we love. We love God, we love what he has done for us in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and so we ought to share him with the people we aspire to love.

So the question is, how? How do we share our faith in a culture that tells us the opposite, that if we really love people we should keep our faith to ourselves? Should we get out a bullhorn and preach a sermon in the middle of Trolley Square? Should we pass out gospel tracts that are made to look like \$100 bills in our cube farm at work, should we get into faith debates at Concord High School and post them on YouTube? Possibly, but for most of you that doesn't align with how God made you and so you would likely be super awkward and ineffective.

[Blank Slide] We think about the Apostle Paul as brash, fearless, heralding the gospel in the open air and debating with the philosophers and religious of his day. And Paul probably would do some of the things that we just talked about and may even be effective. But interestingly, this is not how he tells the rest of us to share our faith. In Colossians 4:2-6, he shows us how to share our faith in the everyday relationships where we live, work, go to school and play. If you were with us last week, we looked at verses 2-4 about the importance of prayer in loving our neighbors and sharing our faith, let's continue to read starting at verse 5. *⁵ Be wise in the way you act toward those outside the faith; making the best use of the time. ⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

Paul gives us **2 keys to intentional and effective faith sharing: #1 Be Wise in your Walk** *v.5 Walk in wisdom toward those outside the faith, making the best use of the time.*

"Wisdom is the use of knowledge in the right place at the right time." You can know lots of things—be a Ph.D., you can be in the know about the geo-political issues of our time, you can be "YouTube smart", and yet be very unwise in your walk (that is how you live, how you interact with people, how you spend your time). Having knowledge and using knowledge are very different. Paul is saying, we should be particularly wise in our relationships with those who don't yet share our faith.

What does this wisdom look like when it is happening? Let me give you two examples of things Paul says elsewhere: 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12 Paul is again teaching about how walk in wisdom with our neighbors: *Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you; so that you may behave properly toward those outside the faith and not be in any need.* Notice the key phrases: "attend to your own business," "work with your hands," "not be in any need." In other words walking in wisdom here means: work hard, be competent, don't meddle in other people's business, and don't be lazy. He's saying, "Don't give people the argument that Christianity makes people lazy or nosy or incompetent or unproductive." Have a good reputation as a neighbor you want to live next to. Wisdom pays attention to the social customs of the community and avoids unnecessarily offensive and rude behavior.

In the same way, Paul says in Titus 3:1-2 that walking in wisdom with your neighbors means we should be **ready for every good work, ² to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.**

How do we relate to others in ways that are most loving and lends credibility to our faith? We don't give anyone a reason to say- "And that guy is a Christian?" or "See, that's why I don't want anything to do with Jesus." Here's a good evaluation question: **"Am I aspiring to live out the "Christ" in the word Christian?"** In your neighborhood, or in your office or school- Are you known as a complainer or encourager? Do you blame others or take personal responsibility? Are you gossiping about others business or known for your kind words? Are you cliquish or inclusive of others? Are you getting into arguments and often angry about something or are you known as someone at peace and fun-loving? Do demonize people on the other side of the political fence or are you gracious and show a modicum of respect? Do you feel the need to point out everyone's faults or can you overlook a minor offense?

Notice Paul also says walking in wisdom toward non-Christians means being **"ready for every good work."** And the early church took this to heart. This was the overwhelming reputation of Christians in the first several centuries in the Roman Empire, even though they were a persecuted minority. In the 4th century, Emperor Julian was trying to revive paganism as Christianity was growing, so he wrote a letter to the pagan priests urging them under threat of death, to do something to compete with the love and generosity Christians were known for saying that Christians, not only supported their own, they supported the weak, the poor, sick, orphaned and widowed that the empire had left out in the cold. But the pagan priesthood had no traditions or doctrines to guide them to love like this, but we do, because our God is love and he calls us to love through good works to all people. FYM **"Where God's love exists, it proclaims loudly that the gospel is indeed alive. Where it does not exist, it cancels out the good news leaving nothing for intended recipients to actually receive."**

Being wise in our walk, is loving our neighbor and neighborhood in practical ways. It starts with seeing a need. We look for the rubble. Small practical needs you can meet. Babysit, lend your tools, fix something in their house, help someone financial need... But probably more than any single act of intentional wisdom and love that we can exercise today is **practicing hospitality.** The percentage of Americans who say they have zero close friends has quadrupled since 1990, 54% report sometimes are always feeling that no one knows them well. People ache to be seen, known, and loved.¹ Ann Voskamp says, "Our theology is best lived out in our hospitality."

So- you aspire to love your neighbor and share your faith? Paul starts by saying: treat your neighbors with respect, show acts of kindness, be helpful, be known as a hard worker, don't be nosy and a gossip. Your walk is just as important as your talk. In fact your walk builds a platform of credibility for your talk. So here's a challenge- **What is one area of your walk where you can grow in wisdom?**

¹ Referenced in John Mark Comer's *Practicing the Way*

2 Keys for intentional and effective faith sharing: #2 Be Salty in your Speech

6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

It's funny how words take on new meanings- about half of us hear "being salty" and think getting our feelings hurt. But when Paul says our conversations should be full of grace, seasoned with salt, he's using a food analogy because salt was in Paul's day and is today a flavor enhancer. Let me help you understand this...Maple Biscuits from Sleeping Bird Coffee near my house...mmm...this is doing something to most of us...making us crave it, our mouth water. Paul is saying that when we share our faith people should be able to as Scripture says, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." What Paul says here is one of the most refreshing and encouraging things I have ever heard anyone say about how to share our faith. It's not a drudgery when we think about it like this.

What does salty speech look like? **1- Share the blessings and benefits of Christianity.** One of the great apologetics for the Christian faith today is that it works in real life. Study after study continues to show that practicing Christians on the whole are happier, have less anxiety, have healthier marriages, are more generous, and outlive those who do not practice the faith...just to name a few stats.² Do you know that while 50% of 1st marriages end in divorce in America, that couples who pray together every day- it's only 1% who get divorced? You want to divorce-proof your marriage- practice Christianity! Now I'm not suggesting that you go around with a list of studies and statistics with your neighbors, but I am suggesting that you talk about how practicing Christianity has blessed your life. How has your faith brought blessing and goodness to your marriage and family, your finances, to facing hardship, to your mental and emotional well-being?

I have had an ongoing friendship and faith dialogue with one of my neighbors- and we started talking about meditation because my neighbor was struggling to turn their mind off, anxiousness and sleep at night. And so told my neighbor about the ancient Hebrew and Christian practice of meditation, which is in some ways opposite of eastern meditation, instead of trying to empty your mind, you fill your mind by focusing your mind on something specific about God or God's Word. If you need peace- you might meditate on Psalm 23 for example. And I told her about how that has really helped me.

2- Be Prepared to give an answer. *says so that you may know how to answer everyone.* Which implies that you are walking in wisdom in such a way that people are asking you about your faith. But we must be ready to give an answer. Now I don't think Paul is saying that we must have an answer to every obscure Bible question, or an answer to the most complex existential quandaries known to man. It's we should be ready to answer why we are a Christian. The old

² <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/01/31/religions-relationship-to-happiness-civic-engagement-and-health-around-the-world/>

school word for this is **testify**. When people ask you about your faith, or you see an opportunity to talk about your faith we testify. Even and I might say especially in the hardships of life.

Testify in times of suffering that God's presence gives us strength to go on.

Testify in times of uncertainty, God's Word guides us and his Peace surrounds us.

Testify in times of grief, God's hope grounds us and comforts us.

Testify in times of defeat, God's victory seen in the resurrection renews our joy.

Testify in times of heartbreak, God's love never fails us.

Testify in times of shame, God's forgiveness in Jesus' sacrifice sets us free.

Testify in times of rejection, God's acceptance reminds us he will never leave us.

Testify in times of confusion, God's truth grounds us in ultimate reality.

See and evaluate how the gospel working in your life. Is it transforming you as you apply it, working it deeper into your heart and life, seeing breakthroughs? When the gospel is working in our lives, when God is real and dear to us, our speech becomes naturally salty. Friends, if we want to be salty in our speech the best thing we can do is simply spend time every day reminding yourself from the Bible why God, why the gospel of Jesus tastes so good to you. Some of us who have been Christians for a long time begin to forget the simple pleasure of just enjoying God. Then an opportunity comes along to tell someone about Him and we realize that all the reasons he is wonderful have been neglected and the keenness of our own taste buds has grown very dull.

So the wonderful thing about Paul's advice here is that the best way be intentional about sharing our faith is to enjoy Him ourselves. One of the regular practices for me is going back to the moment it all clicked for me- what God did for me when he awakened me to the gospel, to the reality that I was a sinner, hopelessly lost, separated from God because of my sin, but because of his grace love and mercy, he sent Jesus to pay for my sin, forgive me and reunite me with God forever, and gave me a new life, a new purpose, a new hope, a new joy and peace.

2 Keys to Intentional and Effective Faith Sharing: #1 Be Wise in your Walk #2 Be Salty in your Speech

We've spent the last 3 weeks talking about loving our neighbors like Jesus by serving them, praying for them and sharing our faith with our neighbors. Now this week we Go. This is the beginning of **Go Week**. The last two years of Go Week we were out serving in the community- cleaning up parks, serving at a number of partner ministries...this year, this week our focus is building relationships with your physical neighbors in proximity to you- where you live, work or play.

This week, we set the course to love our neighbors by hosting a **Neighbors Social** this Saturday April 27. This may be a retirement community, an apartment complex, an urban block, a home on a busy street or a suburban neighborhood. Each day of Go Week we'll provide you with a daily reminder that includes encouragement, Scripture, practical challenges, and prayer prompts to guide you toward this goal. The daily reminder will be sent via the PrayerChain

Email List (if you aren't on there already, use the connect card to sign up for that) and posted on Facebook. We will also send a daily text for those who have opted in for text notifications.

We want to make the Neighbors Social really simple for you, we've made packets that will be in the lobby if you haven't already gotten one, it's not too late. It has all the instructions you will need.

We want to see what you are doing and pray for your event- so on Saturday, take a picture of your set up, get a picture of the group and **text it to 302-563-1524**.