A couple years ago one of our worship leaders came up to me and said, “Some days I think
that what I will be most known for is leading the kids in ‘I’m in the Lord’s Army’.” Here
is a person who is very gifted musically, seeks hard to honor Jesus in all they do, and is
constantly pushing themselves to do more, be better and get more meaningful in their music
expressions – but what God is choosing to encourage people the most with is a simple song they
could do as a beginner musician. They weren’t upset at all about this, but just sharing that
awesome truth I hope we get to as followers of Jesus – it is God who picks and makes our
actions truly significant. And that often doesn’t go according to our plans.

Or take some of our visitors last Sunday. A family of 4 visited from Pennsylvania – a father and
3 kids. They used to live here in Central Vermont and two of those kids were in our Adventure
Club kid’s program about a decade ago. The oldest is now 19 and she was very outgoing –
giving thanks and big hugs to all the Pioneer workers who were here. Now she and her two
brothers seem super dedicated to follow Jesus and she personally wants to teach Jr students
about Jesus because she fell away at that time. A decade ago, our leaders probably had little
idea of how much God would use their simple actions in this gal’s life. It’s far more significant
than they could imagine. It is God who picks and makes our efforts truly significant.

Let’s think about that in light of our Bible passage for today. What will make your life
significant? Does it require lots of people noticing or regularly appreciating your achievements?
Do you imagine doing something no one else has done or doing more than others around you?
Do you envision your life being significant without much effort on your part or it happening
just the way you planned it? Or are you one who thinks you will never do anything truly
significant in this life? All of these have a major focus “on self” and I want to encourage us to
focus more on Jesus because He is the One who makes any of our efforts truly significant?

And we need to remember our culture works against this truth. Our culture sees significance
coming from one’s value – those with more money, specialized skills, or strong abilities are
seen as more significant. A doctor is considered more significant because they can do things
others can’t but a janitor often isn’t seen as significant even though none of us would want to
live in a world without janitors. An executive is often seen as significant, while a stay-at-home
parent is thought to be “wasting their talents.” Our culture also considers it significant if we are
the best in something (breaking a world record, winning a championship, mastering a video
game). But with 7.6 billion people in the world and 325 million people in the US, the likelihood
of that happening to any of us is virtually non-existent. Yet Jesus will make all of our lives
significant if we truly follow Jesus and serve & witness for Him because …

**PROPOSITION:** God is the One who will make our lives truly significant and He often does
this in ways we don’t anticipate but uses some aspect of what we dedicate to Jesus’ work.

I. Significant but not well-known or famous
(Colossians 1:7-8; 4:12-13; Philemon 23)
Here in the letter to the Colossians, Paul turns from the message (the gospel or good news of Jesus) in v 5-6, to messenger (Epaphras) in v 7-8. READ. So is Epaphras significant? Historically, he is mentioned in just 3 Bible passages, no other sources: here in v 7-8, later in this letter in chapter 4 verses 12-13 and one other time in the book of Philemon verse 23 where he is called a fellow prisoner with Paul.

A. Paul famous, Epaphras not

There are only 179 words written about him in Wikipedia which is on-line so it is not limited in size like printed material is. Were you inspired by Epaphras last year? Did you wake up today wanting to follow Jesus like Epaphras did? Probably not! Contrast that with the apostle Paul who is far more famous, especially among Christians. Paul was famous, but Epaphras was not.

Yet it seems that Epaphras was the one who started the church in the city of Colossae and was at least instrumental in planting the churches in Laodicea and Hierapolis. Notice Paul found Epaphras’ help to be very significant – “our dear fellow servant” and “a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf.” READ v 7. The Colossians learned the gospel from Epaphras. Paul is the one we know, but Epaphras did the work in that valley. Paul has countless pages in books written about him, but there is not enough info to make even a page long article on Epaphras. That is what our lives look like on the outside by our own efforts – we’ll be fortunate if history records even a couple words on us in a footnote. So what made Epaphras significant when he is clearly not famous?

B. What made Epaphras significant was that he shared the gospel

What made Epaphras significant is that he shared the gospel and served those churches. READ v 7. (You = Colossian believers – learned it = truly understood the gospel of Jesus). So what exactly did Epaphras do that made the gospel so compelling and understandable to the people there so that they left their old life and turned to a harder Christian life? We aren’t told. What we do know is that God used and multiplied some of Epaphras’ obedience and willingness to share Jesus with others. It would be wrong of us to think we need to come up with some major, unique or noteworthy plan for Jesus to live a significant life. As we simply share Jesus with those around us and serve Jesus in everyday life – God takes those simple actions and uses them in very significant ways – ways we won’t know until heaven.

Lately I’ve been telling the people outside the church – that God is encouraging people far more by me walking up 3 steps and pushing the pulpit to the middle than any words I say! That’s great – it takes the pressure off me personally to always having to do something great. And then I am constantly amazed at God because He can take the smallest phrase or simplest witness and multiple that for incredible good. The most significant day in the history of Colossae was when Xerxes or Cyrus came to town – it was when an unknown Epaphras planted the seed of the gospel. No fanfare or parade, just lives changed for eternity. 

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1. Personally believe Jesus is good news
Because sharing the good news about Jesus is so very important for eternity – in fact, it is the very name of our church (the word “evangelical” is simply the word gospel in a different language) – and because Christians sometimes feel they aren’t good or knowledgeable enough to personally share about Jesus – I want to take a side-track to encourage all of us that there are ways we can all share – because it is God that takes our small actions and multiplies them for the advancement of His work. Therefore we need to start by simply believing that the message of Jesus – that he died for our sins and rose bodily from the dead to prove that is REALLY GOOD NEWS. Don’t view witnessing for Jesus as this impossible task of finding some magic words to get an un-interested person to be open to the truths of the Bible. Instead, simply start by being amazed anew at how great the good news of Jesus is! We don’t deserve forgiveness, heaven and a renewed relationship with God, but Jesus offers that & more if we will simply humble ourselves & repent of our sins, believe Jesus died on the cross to forgive our sins and rose bodily from the dead to prove it. How great is that! When we are excited, we naturally share more!

2. Make a point to be around the spiritually lost (except where they entice you to sin)
It is important for us to be around the unchurched or we won’t see when God miraculously opens up their spiritual interest. Jesus’ heart for the lost led Him to be around people who were not living a God-honoring life. If we don’t know or spend any time with unbelievers, natural conversations won’t happen. Now some of you are often around the spiritually lost in places like public school, workplaces, extended family or your neighborhood. But if you don’t have those, use activities you like to get to know those who aren’t following Jesus – like hobbies, sports, clubs, activities, interests. We are the most unchurched state in the US – so we don’t have to work hard to be in a place God can use us. Now there is one VERY, VERY important limit God gives to all of us – if the people we hang around with start to entice, or tempt us to sin, then we need to break off those relationships.

3. Simply identify yourself with Jesus (fly your flag)
The next step everyone can take to be a witness for Jesus is to simply “fly our flag” – that just means we let people know in simple, natural ways that we follow Jesus. “Flying our flag” refers to the practice of ocean ships before radios – other ships would know who that ship was aligned with simply by seeing what flags they flew. When we simply mention Jesus, the church, the Bible, or a spiritual activity we are part of in our natural conversation of what is happening in our lives than we have flown our Jesus flag without having to come up with some way to initiate a spiritual conversation. We can all do that naturally – again its easier when we are excited. I had a great time at youth group last week, I was really encouraged by something my pastor said or my church has done. We aren’t asking the other person to do anything or agree with
us—we are just letting it be known we are Christians so that when a person begins to seek spiritual input, it is more likely that our name will come up as to who to have a spiritual conversation with. It is especially important to identify any compassion we show others with Jesus so it points to God instead of us. You don’t have to explain anything—if they say thank you, you can simply practice replying, “Your welcome, I did it for Jesus” and walk away.

4. Plant Biblical “seeds”
Similar to identifying outwardly with Jesus, we can ALL “plant” or “sow” gospel seeds for God to grow. We plant a gospel seed when we purposefully share a spiritual statement that offers an opening for more conversation if someone is interested. I often look for opportunities to share the last big thing I’ve seen God do through our church or in one of your lives when someone asks “How are you doing?” Before I would say something like, “My body isn’t doing so well but I am so excited Jesus opened up a way for us to help the Syrian refugees OR I’ve really been stressing lately, but was finally able to give my worries back to God.” In a gospel seed there is no pressure on the other person to say or believe something—but if they ask about what happened, it is easy to share more of your faith very naturally.

Another place we can sow gospel seeds is in our response to other people’s normal statements. For example, if someone shares with you that their boss is driving them crazy. We can play it safe and say “My boss drives me crazy too” or you can plant a seed, “I was really struggling with that last year, but my friends at church helped me to see …” Sharing a favorite Bible verse that has helped answer a problem for you is yet another way to sow gospel seeds. Notice our lives don’t have to be going great nor do we have to somehow become extrovert or super smart to plant a gospel seed. Each of these introduces a spiritual statement in a natural, non-threatening way so that those interested can continue the conversation while those who aren’t open at that time don’t feel they are on the spot. Flying our Flag and planting spiritual seeds helps us figure out who God is miraculously working inside.

5. Commit to dropping anything & having an immediate conversation when you see spiritual interest
If we see spiritual interest in a non-Christian’s life, then we need to be committed to drop whatever we are doing and simply have a spiritual conversation with that person. That spiritual interest may be a miracle of God and it may not be there the next morning. Don’t worry about having some fancy words to say, just start by asking questions about their spiritual interest and understanding. God will then make it evident when you can share your testimony or the full gospel. Because God desires ALL to be saved, there is some point in every human’s life when they will be open to hear the message of Jesus. That doesn’t mean they will become Christians but you will have a truly
significant conversation. Don’t forget – these miracle openings of God are almost always at an unexpected time, so the most important part of God using you in significant ways, is simply your availability to stop what you are doing and have a spiritual conversation when you see spiritual interest. Don’t view “sharing Jesus” as awkwardly trying to get an uninterested person talking about Jesus. Instead let’s rely on God! These conversations bring excitement back to our spiritual life because they are significant and we see it is about God, not us.

6. Invite – to read Bible/Christian materials, come to Christian meeting, etc.

Notice that we have shared 5 effective ways to witness for Jesus which God can use in powerful ways, and all of them can be done in our culture without having to be super bold, out-going, very knowledgeable or having the skills of a good sales person! The last few I will mention is where people often think of starting and it can be more overwhelming because when you do these there is often a direct or implied response being asked for. Inviting people to consider Jesus – you can invite by giving a Bible or Christian literature – you can invite someone to a Christian, teaching time or worship service. We simply make the invitation giving them full freedom to decline. We leave the results to God.

7. Share gospel – testimony or full gospel presentation

Finally we can more fully personally explain, proclaim, or illustrate the good news of Jesus. Sharing our own story of how we gave our lives to Jesus or saw God do something only God can do is called “our testimony”. This is especially valuable in times of great opposition and antagonism against Christ. We can go through a gospel presentation like the Roman Road to salvation, the Bridge illustration or Steps to Peace with God. We can practice apologetics – defending God’s truth in a more hostile or questioning environment. Even these, which require more preparation on our part, are still totally dependent on God taking our words and using them in a significant way.

C. Content with just being a part of God’s work

Believe it or not, our greatest opposition to sharing Jesus freely actually comes from inside us rather than an antagonistic culture or direct demonic opposition. We can get scared – we can feel unworthy – we can get too busy or want comfort too much – we can think we have to do it all by our strength and abilities. These we’ve tried to disarm by seeing it is God who does the work and there are many intentional ways to witness for Jesus than just presenting the full gospel presentation. But another attitude that can stop us from living a significant life is *sinful pride*. Notice how Epaphras has let go of that pride – he is content with just being a part of God’s work. READ v 7. Epaphras is content to simply be a fellow servant of Jesus. He is content to be a faithful minister of Christ on Paul & Timothy’s behalf. But Paul and Timothy haven’t even come to the Colossian area – let alone do any of the work. When we are content with just being a part of God’s work, God can transform our simple words and actions into significant happenings. But if we insist on being recognized, lasting significance won’t come.
II. Keep growing spiritually

Finally, we come to v 8 which reminds us of the importance of continuing to grow spiritually if we want to live a life of significance. READ v 8. The Colossians heard the life changing message of Jesus through Epaphras and now Epaphras is sharing the transformation that he continues to see in the Colossians’ lives with the apostle Paul while they are held prisoner together.

A. Active in our faith

READ v 8. We see their active faith in Jesus coming out in practical expressions of Christian love. As we mentioned a few weeks ago, growing in faith, hope or love is like an apostolic shorthand for genuine growth in our Christian life. Because God is real and we will live for eternity – growing in our faith is key in living a truly significant life.

B. Connected with others

The love that is spoken of here is not some mushy feeling for another person, but it is actions we take to seek the best for another person long term. Look back in v 4 – the love of the Colossians being spoken of here is “the love you have for all God’s people”. Again if we are going to live a significant life, then we need to be connected to & interact with people. That is why I say that all Christian ministry is ultimately inter-personal. People are the only entities that go to heaven. As frustrating as people can get at times, for anything truly significant in life, God is going to use us in other peoples’ lives and them in our lives.

C. Dependent on God’s Spirit

Lastly we have the phrase “in the Spirit” describe love here is. READ v 8. So what is “love in the Spirit”? As we’ve mentioned before, Love is first an active outgrowth of our faith in Jesus and second it involves actions we take towards and with other people. Now God reminds us that this love comes from and is dependent on God’s Holy Spirit. This is consistent with other New Testament scripture.

- Romans 5:5 says, “And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” It is the Holy Spirit that helps us experience God’s love much more profoundly and then empower us to show it to others who may seem to be unlovable, frustrating or an enemy.
- Galatians 5:22 tells us “But the fruit of the Spirit – the positive results of the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives – is love, joy, peace…” A primary result of yielding to the Holy Spirit is first off love. It is the love that the Holy Spirit is producing in our lives enabling us to love other sinful & broken, especially fellow believers.

People around you are going to spend their whole lives trying to be significant or being depressed because they can’t see themselves achieving it. As Christians we can be assured God will use our simple acts of worship, love, service and witness in eternally significant ways as long as we don’t need the credit. Keep overcoming in Jesus’ power!