



DAYSPRING
WESLEYAN CHURCH
REACH | GROW | WORSHIP | SERVE

A STUDY ON COLOSSIANS

ONLY JESUS

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Introduction

WELCOME!

We are so excited that you have decided to join us for a deep dive into Colossians! Our prayer is that every day of the next 4 weeks will add a better understanding of God's Word to your life.

Here are some ways to make the most of this Colossians flavored month:

- **Make the time.** *Carve out some time to make the daily devotionals part of your life.* In fact, may this even kickstart a rhythm in your life where this healthy spiritual habit can continue to enrich your spiritual life beyond this course.
- **Make this a priority.** *Why don't you make this a high priority for the month? Let us commit.* Aim to skip nothing: Neither the daily devotions, nor any of the 4 Sunday gatherings. Of course, we understand that "life happens", but let us aim from day one with all our might in Christ for a month of letting the Word of God soak into every inch of our lives.
- **Be honest.** The devotions, as well as the discussions, encourage you to think carefully about where you are with the Lord, how you think about God and His ways, and how you live your life. *Growth will be the greatest if you can be honest in all of your reflections and answers to questions.*
- **Participate and be patient.** *The goal is for you to open yourself up as much as you can.* Stretch a bit. Share your heart with your spouse, your children, other friends / family as you continue to be challenged by God's Word day by day, week after week. On Sunday evenings, don't wait only for others to share. Share your heart, opinion and thoughts too - the Holy Spirit is also at work in your life...it is a loss to others if you do not share what the Spirit has impressed on your heart - *please participate.*

Remember to be patient with one another as we participate and share. We are not all in the same place with our spiritual journeys. Therefore, let us create a "safe place" where everyone can share comfortably from where they are at in their walk with the Lord, without feeling judged, rushed, or not being valued by one another.

- **Expect great things.** Expect to be challenged. Expect to be transformed. Expect change. Expect growth. *Pray, read, ponder and get together with your spouse, your family, and your church family with an expectation that God will move through the Book of Colossians in all our lives in these 4 weeks, to His honor and glory!*

THE BIBLE

This course has been solidly built around the Word of God. For the most part the New International Version (1984 edition), the **NIV84 translation** for short, has been used. Sometimes an alternative translation will be offered based upon the way that the original Bible languages might lead us to interpret a specific text. It will be incredibly important to have your Bible ready for every lesson. Even though an App or another electronic Bible can be used, it is suggested that a printed Bible could be of great benefit for the purpose of this course. Why? Simply because it is often helpful to underline something, highlight it, make a note, or simply just have the Bible open while you ponder a text, or pray over it.

THEME

The theme for our 4 weeks together is going to be...

ONLY JESUS

and each week we will take a closer look at what this means:

Week 1 - *Jesus: Only He can show us God.*

Week 2 - *Jesus: Only He can connect us with God.*

Week 3 - *Jesus: Only He is worth living for.*

Week 4 - *Jesus: Only He - the world should know!*

COURSE SETUP

This course is set up with **6 devotions**, one for each day, Monday through Saturday, and then culminating in a ***Sunday Colossians celebration!***

Sunday mornings' sermons will have a Message from Colossians, and Sunday *evenings* will start with a meal at 5 pm, followed by three 10 minute messages, and three 15 minute group discussions, wrapped within an introduction and a summary, all-in-all taking us from 6 pm to 7:30 pm.

You will find a few **“Dig deeper sections”** from time to time throughout this course. When you encounter these, please note that you can *skip* it without interrupting the flow of the

section that you are working on. Feel free to *return to it later*, or enjoy reading through it if you actually do have the time. As for the “dig deeper”, or any other section of this course, always remember that you can ask any *questions* to your leader or pastor whenever you get stuck, or simply would like to learn more.

This course will have the maximum impact if you do the **devotions** faithfully. It is very important that this thought doesn't scare or overwhelm you. Here are some pointers about the devotions that we pray will encourage you, so you can jump into this with a peace and a joy!

- **Designed to take 25 minutes.** We truly hope that this will be a *meaningful, and manageable activity*, and even become part of your daily walk with the Lord after this course. On average the devotionals should take 25 minutes or less: 15 minutes to read, reflect and answer some questions, another 5 minutes to spend in prayer, and 5 minutes to journal if this is something you enjoy.
- **Do what you can.** *Something is always better than nothing.* No need to feel guilty, and no need to feel overwhelmed. The goal is simple: At least do something, and simply do what you can. Each devotion is structured so that you can choose if you want to answer all the questions, do all the reflections, or simply a selection of it. At the very least, reading the text, pondering it in general for a minute or so, and then saying a prayer should be possible for all of us.
- **Do it when you can.** For some, early mornings with a cup of coffee works great. For others, lunch time can do the trick. For our night owls, late nights will be best. *There is no time that's better than another time* - the only time that is a bad time, is to set aside “no time” - let us commit to avoid that option.
- **Do it with somebody.** Devotions by yourself absolutely has meaning, but remember, doing it with someone else could be exciting too. It is sometimes awesome hearing the heart of your spouse, kids or friend. *Decide what works best for you, or perhaps even do a mix.*
- **Use the blank page.** Every day's devotion will be on the left side of your workbook, with a blank page on the right side. The idea is for you to use this at will: Some of us like to draw what the Lord lays on our heart, while others like to make a note, or write a question down to ponder later...or to be asked on Sunday. And if you are not a writer, but more of a thinker - that is totally fine too.
- **Have fun!** Enjoying a nice dinner, relaxing in front of the TV, reading your favorite book, or watching the kids doing their sports are all supposed to be fun evening activities. So is spending time with the Word of God. With the correct mindset this can be such a blessing to you, your marriage and your family - *please have fun doing it!*

THE BOOK OF COLOSSIANS

Colossians is an incredible letter written by the apostle Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to the Church in Colossae. Here are some things that we think you should keep in mind to help you understand Colossians well.

Prison Letters

Colossians, along with Ephesians, Philemon and Philippians, are all part of what is known as the “Prison Letters” of Paul, also known as the *Imprisonment Epistles*. This is because Paul wrote all 4 of these Letters while in prison (as for Colossians see Col 4:3, 10, 18 and 1:24). It is also noteworthy that *Ephesians*, *Colossians* and *Philemon* probably relate better to an *earlier period* of imprisonment with a lot of emphasis on *suffering*, while *Philippians* refers to a period *a bit later* in Paul’s prison time with vague references to chains and almost a repeating refrain of *Christian joy despite suffering*.

Thus, one might conclude (and this is simply one plausible scenario) that *Colossians*, *Ephesians* and *Philemon* could have been written somewhere between 56 and 58 AD during Paul’s prison time in the *coastal city of Caesarea*. A little later then, perhaps in the spring of 60 AD *Philippians* could have been written during Paul’s two year period of house arrest in *Rome*, following the 2 year prison time in Caesarea.

Some other Interesting Facts

Paul, with the help of *Timothy* (Colossians 1:1), writes to the church in *Colossae in Phrygia, Asia Minor* (currently in Southwest Turkey). Paul didn’t plant this church. It might have been *founded by Epaphras*, a highly respected fellow worker of Paul (Colossians 1:7; 4:12).

The city of *Colossae* seems to have been destroyed by the same *earthquake* that caused devastation to the nearby cities of Hierapolis and Laodicea in 60-61 AD, during Caesar Nero’s reign.

A close relation between Colossians and Ephesians is undeniable. If you would read the two letters side by side you’d be amazed at the similarities. They are very close in how Christ and the church are presented, the roles of Tychicus, Archippus, and Onesimus as fellow brothers and servants of Paul in the Lord, and finally similarities in literary style and word use.

Week 1

Jesus: Only He can show us God

Devotion - Monday

Read - Take a moment to listen as God speaks to you

Colossians 1:1-8

Underline at least 3 words that simply catches your eye/heart as you read through this passage:

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ² To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace and peace to you from God our Father. ³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints— ⁵ the faith and love that spring from the Hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the Word of truth, the Gospel ⁶ that has come to you. All over the world this Gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. ⁷ You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, ⁸ and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

Ponder - Take a moment to open your heart to what God wants to instill in you

Use any or all of these to help guide your thoughts:

- Take a moment to ponder why the words you have underlined made an impression on you.
- To be an "apostle" means "to be sent", in this case to be "sent by the will of God". The goal would be to bring the Message of Christ Jesus to people, which would even include you, right in this very moment. How does this make you feel?
- Do you know others who have been sent by the will of God to bring God's Message to people? How do they inspire you?
- Do you think you've been sent by the will of God in some way? For example, were you sent to share this news about Jesus with a friend, a colleague, a child, a grandchild...? Have you ever thought about "being sent by the will of God" to someone?
- How does this passage encourage, challenge, or perhaps even change you?

Pray - Take a moment to share your heart with God

Journal - Take a moment to write down what is on your heart right now

NOTES

[illegible]

Devotion - Tuesday

Read - Take a moment to listen as God speaks to you

Colossians 1:9-14

Underline at least 3 words that simply catches your eye/heart as you read through this passage:

⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. ¹⁰ And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹ being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully ¹² giving thanks to the Father, Who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the Kingdom of light. ¹³ For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son He loves, ¹⁴ in Whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Ponder - Take a moment to open your heart to what God wants to instill in you

- Take a moment to ponder why the words you have underlined made an impression on you.
- It is striking how important it was for Paul to pray for other people, in this case the believers at Colossae. See how many things you can identify that he prayed for.
- It is quite obvious that many of the things Paul prayed for were spiritual needs, blessings and growth for the believers. Many prayer requests that people will often share with us have something to do with their physical needs, which is of course very important to pray over. However, would you agree that it could be a great idea to also ask them to pray for spiritual needs? What are some spiritual things that you would like to pray over people you know?
- How does verse 12 make you feel - remember this also applies to you as a believer: "... giving thanks to the Father, Who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the Kingdom of light" ...?
- How does this passage encourage, challenge, or perhaps even change you?

Pray - Take a moment to share your heart with God

Journal - Take a moment to write down what is on your heart right now

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Devotion - Wednesday

Read - Take a moment to listen as God speaks to you

Colossians 1:15-20

Underline at least 3 words that simply catches your eye/heart as you read through this passage:

¹⁵ He is the Image of the invisible God, the Firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the Beginning and the Firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, ²⁰ and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.

Ponder - Take a moment to open your heart to what God wants to instill in you

- Take a moment to ponder why the words you have underlined made an impression on you.
- Make a list of the different ways in which Jesus is described in this passage.
- Let us ponder verse 18 more where we read Jesus is the “Head of the body, the church”. Together we are like a body - some of us are hands, feet, legs, arms...and Jesus is the Head. As believers we are all connected, and above all intensely connected to Jesus. No body can function without the head being completely connected to the body. Think about it, a head that just sits loosely on a body - that would be weird, scary, and there is no way that body will go anywhere, or do anything! It will only be a short while and it will collapse. Only as long as Jesus is closely connected to the body, will it go well with the body! This also means that you are never alone. We are all connected. Together with Christ’s body you can be strong, you can make a difference. You never have to fear what you should do, or where you should go, or what you should say, because the Head (Jesus) of your body, will guide you, lead you, tell you, and take care of you!
- How does this passage encourage, challenge, or perhaps even change you?

Pray - Take a moment to share your heart with God

Journal - Take a moment to write down what is on your heart right now

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Devotion - Thursday

Read - Take a moment to listen as God speaks to you

Colossians 1:21-23

Underline at least 3 words that simply catches your eye/heart as you read through this passage:

²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²² But now He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation— ²³ if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the Gospel. This is the Gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Ponder - Take a moment to open your heart to what God wants to instill in you

- Take a moment to ponder why the words you have underlined made an impression on you.
- This passage holds such great news! In Jesus we can shift from being enemies of God to being friends of God. It says that because of Jesus we can shift from being stuck in our sin and not being right with God at all, to being forgiven and having peace with God. It says that because of Jesus we do not have to fear death anymore. We can have eternal life, and live such a wonderful life in Jesus that after death Jesus can present us before our holy God in perfect condition, completely pure and holy! This is the Gospel Message. This is what Jesus made possible at high cost through His sacrifice on the cross. Have you received this Message yet? Have you made it your own yet? Is this not the best News ever!
- Paul is so excited and honored to be a servant, to be a part of having this great Message being "proclaimed to every creature under heaven". You can be...and you actually are...a servant of this incredible Message too. You can be a part of bringing it to those in your own home, school or workplace. You can also be a part of bringing this Message to the ends of the earth. Are you also excited and honored to be a part of this with Paul?
- How does this passage encourage, challenge, or perhaps even change you?

Pray - Take a moment to share your heart with God

Journal - Take a moment to write down what is on your heart right now

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Devotion - Friday

Read - Take a moment to listen as God speaks to you

Colossians 1:24-29

Underline at least 3 words that simply catches your eye/heart as you read through this passage:

²⁴ Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of His body, which is the church. ²⁵ I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the Word of God in its fullness— ²⁶ the Mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. ²⁷ To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this Mystery, which is Christ in you, the Hope of glory. ²⁸ We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. ²⁹ To this end I labor, struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me.

Ponder - Take a moment to open your heart to what God wants to instill in you

- Take a moment to ponder why the words you have underlined made an impression on you.
- Try to identify all the ways in which this passage shows that Paul is deeply committed to serve Christ by getting the Gospel Message out to people (look for example at verses 24 and 29). Is Paul all in? What does this stir in your heart?
- Paul is not simply telling people they should receive Christ. He goes beyond that and also serves the new believers in other ways. See if you can identify some of the different ways that Paul is serving the church (look for example at verses 25 and 28). How does this change the way you think about bringing someone to faith in Christ?
- How does this passage encourage, challenge, or perhaps even change you?

Pray - Take a moment to share your heart with God

Journal - Take a moment to write down what is on your heart right now

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Devotion - Saturday

Read - Take a moment to listen as God speaks to you

Colossians 2:1-5

Underline at least 3 words that simply catches your eye/heart as you read through this passage:

¹ I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. ² My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the Mystery of God, namely, Christ, ³ in Whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴ I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. ⁵ For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

Ponder - Take a moment to open your heart to what God wants to instill in you

- Take a moment to ponder why the words you have underlined made an impression on you.
- Verse 1 reminds us yet again that Paul always has the Church of Christ in focus (not only one specific local church). Even though he writes this letter to the church in Colossae, he also includes the nearby believers in the city of Laodicea, and even mentions everyone he hasn't met yet. He cares equally about all, and has such a high purpose in his ministry to them. Read through verse 2 again and see what you can learn from things that Paul felt new believers should know. Imagine you have only met Christ not too long ago. Would these not be amazing truths to learn more about? How about we focus on these when we continue our walk with people who are new in their faith journey?
- When you think back on this week: What stood out to you more than anything else?
- When you think ahead to tomorrow: Be in prayer for God's servant to bring God's Message to God's people, and pray that the Holy Spirit will prepare and open your heart to receive this well.

Pray - Take a moment to share your heart with God

Journal - Take a moment to write down what is on your heart right now

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Sunday Evening Gathering

Message 1: Colossians 1:4, 5, 6, 9

Time for some extraordinary good news!

We often share all kinds of extraordinary troubles in the world around us, or from our own lives with one another.

We often share all kinds of extraordinary things about nature, incredible moments from the world of sports, or amazing accomplishments from the lives of our children or grandkids.

Let us not forget though: There are some extraordinary things from our walk with the Lord that should also be shared, with equal and perhaps even greater excitement. Paul includes some of these extraordinary spiritual moments that we should celebrate, be grateful for, and share:

- Col 1:4a, "...because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus..."

There are people who put their faith so openly in Christ Jesus, and with such powerful conviction, that it encourages *others* to start talking about it - extraordinary!

- Col 1:4b, "...and of the love you have for all the saints..."

There are people whose faith has brought them to a depth where they don't only love those whom they stand in close relationship with, but their love extends to truly and deeply include believers with whom they have little or no relationship with - extraordinary!

- Col 1:5-6a, "...the faith and love that spring from the Hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the Word of truth, the Gospel that has come to you. All over the world this Gospel is bearing fruit and growing..."

We can hope for many things that sometimes happen...and often simply don't. However, there is also a kind of Hope, as Paul talks about here, that is an absolute certainty. This is a Hope that is stored in heaven, therefore we know the quality is the best, and our Lord guarantees that it will deliver, without fail, every time, for eternity. It is from this fixed, unfailing Hope, connected to the absolute truth about salvation in our Lord, that we can now have faith and know how to love. No wonder this faith and love looks so differently from anything else this world has to offer: It's nature is being determined by a divine Hope, stored

up in heaven, that Christ Jesus made possible and told us about. Perhaps we can say it like this: The absolute truth about an extraordinary Hope we have in Christ Jesus becomes the driving force for a faith that runs deep and strong, and a Christ-like love that reaches far and wide.

- Col 1:6b, "...just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it..."

So many things slow down, stop, or ultimately fail because of geographical, socio-political, economic or racial barriers. With Christ, however, an extraordinary Gospel Message of salvation broke into this world! Therefore, it is no surprise that its divine nature cannot be stopped by any worldly barriers. Thus, this Gospel is spreading "all over the world", and it is also making an actual difference as it grows with a heavenly force. Like a healthy plant it is constantly "bearing fruit and growing", even "just as it has been doing among you [us] since the day you [we] heard it"! Now, how does this extraordinary Message get to reach "all over the world"? Of course, through "us"...and who is the "us"? This is actually so interesting! Living in a Western, more individualistic geared society we might think of a collection of individuals, but for Paul, living in a group oriented society, this "you"/we/us would refer to only one thing, namely "one group", and what group does Paul have in mind...none other than the Church, the Body of Christ, sharing the same faith with the same Head (Jesus), growing together, and working together as one extraordinary Christ-driven unit to reach... *the world!* How powerful is this image of the Church of our Lord!

- Col 1:6c, "...and understood God's grace in all its truth."

You've got to understand the grace of God...*that found you!* It is so extremely, perhaps we can even say "dangerously", easy to take the grace of God for granted (even "in vain" sometimes, as Paul warns in 2 Corinthians 6:1, "As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain."). We have the privilege to have grown up in a country where Christ is known, and proclaimed, often even from birth in our homes. This could so easily lead to a place where we think this "grace in all its truth" is simply readily available for all, all over the world, to hear and grasp. Of course, we know it is not. In fact millions still have no, or very little access to the Gospel Message. Therefore, the fact that you can read over Colossians 1:6c, "...and understood God's grace in all its truth", and simply immediately say in your heart, "Yep, that's me, that's true, I get it", is actually an extraordinary privilege and huge blessing! A blessing that we should highly value!

- Col 1:7, "You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf..."

Now what we just shared about having easy access to God's grace-filled Message in America, leads into the next blessing, "You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf". If you had no, or very little access

to hearing about God's grace, then you'd probably be inclined to remember the person sent by God to bring this incredible truth to you a bit better. Perhaps we can learn from this and remember who the people were who brought God's grace to us, whether it was parents from birth, a school friend, a youth pastor... This is not to put them on a pedestal and glorify them. However, it should remind us that it is extraordinary that our God, whose grace is of course not bound by human involvement, still often chooses not to bypass human carriers of this incredible Message, thus allowing the hearers to receive a divine Message through an earthly vessel to spark an extraordinary life filled with "love in the Spirit" (Col 1:8)! How can remembering those who brought God's grace so close to us so that we could receive it, not inspire us to become *carriers of this grace* to others?

Discussion 1 - Extraordinary spiritual moments

All of us experience moments in life, nature, sports, or events in our family lives that we probably would remember as: That was something extraordinary - we should remember that! Can you recall *one* of these extraordinary experiences and share it with us?

Of course we also experience some amazing spiritual moments. Paul have listed these below, as we learned from Colossians 1. Read slowly through them and share which *one* of these extraordinary spiritual moments catches your heart - any specific reason why?

1. *A faith* expressed by some that even encourages others to talk about it.
 2. *A love* that some express to other believers, whom they barely know, in such a significant way that these fellow believers *quickly* feel *truly loved*.
 3. *The hope* we have anchored in God is so exceptional that it provides a certainty and a drive in our lives that nothing else can compete with.
 4. *The Gospel Message* is simply unstoppable - nothing else on earth is so relentless in crossing all barriers like time, culture, language, racial, geographical, and so forth.
 5. *God's grace* has found you and me, and we get to understand the deep value of it!
 6. *Someone* was sent by God to bring this Gospel Message to you - thank God for this "someone"!
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Discussion 2 - Carriers of God's grace

A bit of background on the term "grace". God's grace is that which can only come from God, and is bestowed upon us without us deserving a drop of it. This grace, coming from God, bridges the gap between us and God, connects us with the sacrifice of Jesus, washes away our sin and guilt with the blood of Jesus, and makes a new life possible that can now actually have meaning and hope. Simply put: Without us doing a single thing to deserve it, God's grace finds us where we are at with all our junk, cleans us up, and makes us new.

Who was the carrier of God's grace to you? In other words, who brought the Gospel Message to you? Perhaps we can also say it like this: Who told you about Jesus?

Some amazing news for you: You are a carrier of grace too. One could perhaps also say, you can also be a "conduit" of God's grace to the people around you! How could this extraordinary responsibility continue to unfold in your life - don't try and figure it all out...let's keep it simple: What could be the *one*, next step for you to bring God's grace just a bit closer to someone else in your life?

Message 2: Col 1:15-23

Wow, *this is my Jesus* - did you hear?!

There is an unmistakably clear and present threat to the identify of Jesus. We live in a society where there is a very intentional spiritual attack on the truth about our Lord and Savior. The drive is to make Him equal, if not less, than other gods and/or entities, such as Buddha, Mohammed, Hindu gods, philosophers, philanthropists, and more. When we do that, Christianity automatically gets downgraded (and degraded!) to the same level as that of all other world religions. Thus very quickly we depart from a One and Only True God faith, constituting an absolute above and set-apart religion (Christianity), taking us rapidly to the dangerous road of universalism (all will eventually be saved, somehow), and pluralism (all religions should be recognized and none can, nor should they, challenge the other - basically, all roads lead to heaven).

Paul makes it abundantly clear in many places within his letters, but in a very concise way here in Colossians 1 that Jesus is far more than just a human, even a very spiritual or wise human, and He is not simply *another* “god”, He IS God, He is the SAME God as the Father and the Holy Spirit.

This is how Paul lays it out:

- Col 1:15a, “He [Jesus] is the Image of the invisible God...”

Even though we cannot see God with our own eyes, we have Jesus. He is the “Image of the invisible God”. Therefore by looking at Jesus we can see who God is, and how He does things. This is also why other passages refer to Jesus as the One and Only, the unique Son of God, as we all know from one of the most quoted verses in the Bible, John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His One and Only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life”. By presenting Jesus to us with the metaphor of a “Son” of God does not imply that God as “Father” now has a wife in heaven, and therefore Jesus as “Son” was born to us through the virgin Mary. Rather, this has much to do with the way that people in Jesus’ time looked at the oldest son. In this culture children, especially and foremost the *firstborn son* was to be an extension of their parents, and very specifically of the father. The Son thus basically becomes a *duplicate* of the Father - if the word existed in the ancient culture they might even have said the goal of a firstborn son would be to *clone* the father. In other words, by using a family metaphor the Bible is not trying to say that we are serving “two gods” in some pantheistic sense - far from it! In fact, given the ancient understanding of the relationship between a firstborn son and his father, this metaphor is actually helping us to understand we are truly talking about *one God*. Referring to Jesus as not only the firstborn Son, but the “One and Only” Son of God, a *unique* Son, helps us to

understand without any doubt: Jesus IS God. He knows God. He shows God. He is indeed the "Image of the invisible God"!

Dig deeper section

Some other passages in the Gospels now become even clearer. It should for example come as no surprise that God announces to the world at Jesus' baptism, "You are My Son, Whom I love, with You I am well pleased". Jesus would in turn through His ministry time identify His unique relationship with God as that of a Son who can reveal the Father, knowing the heart of the Father the best. We're reminded of Jesus sharing over and over in examples such as Matthew 11:27, "All things have been committed to Me by My Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him"; John 7:28b-29, "Yes, you know Me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on My own, but He [God the Father] who sent Me is true. You do not know Him, but I know Him because I am from Him and He sent Me", and John 8:55, "Though you do not know Him [God the Father], I know Him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know Him and keep His Word". Furthermore, as the Father gives eternal life, Jesus does the same, "For the Father loves the Son and shows Him all He does. Yes, to your amazement He will show Him even greater things than these. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom He is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent Him (John 5:20-23). Bottomline: Whoever has seen Jesus, has also seen the Father - has seen...GOD, "Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you really knew Me, you would know My Father as well. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him.' Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.' Jesus answered: 'Don't you know Me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in Me? The words I say to you are not just My own. Rather, it is the Father, living in Me, who is doing his work. Believe Me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves" (John 14:6-11).

- Col 1:16a, 17a, "For by Him [Jesus] all things were created: Things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...He is before all things..."

All things were created by Jesus - all things! Things in heaven and on earth, literally everything and everyone! Jesus was there *before* anything was created. Yes, verse 17 says, "He is before all things"! And Jesus created everything? Yes, verse 16 says "by Him all things were created". Is Jesus then truly God? YES! As God created, Jesus Created - Jesus IS God.

Colossians 1:16 also says that Jesus created not only things that we can see, but also things that we cannot see. So Jesus as God, God as Jesus, created the trees, sea, the stars, the sun, the

moon, and us...things, people, that we can see. But Jesus also created all that we cannot see! What would that be? Of course things like heaven and angels, but just as important: Jesus also created things like “love, peace, joy, hope”. What does this mean? It means that if we try to love someone without Jesus in our lives it will actually be impossible to get it right. Why? Because real love has been created by Jesus - any kind of other love that the world talks about will be fake and will come to nothing. It means that if we try to have peace in our lives, but everything just keeps getting worse and more and more scary, or if we’re trying to be joyful, but we’re just getting more and more sad, or if we feel like we have no hope anymore - all of this is a reflection of Jesus not truly being in our lives. It is only when Jesus enters our lives that true love, peace, joy and hope can follow! Isn’t this great news! No matter what you are going through, you can have love, peace, joy and hope in your life from this very moment. How? By opening your heart and your life for Jesus - it is truly that simple, and that powerful.

- Col 1:17b, “...in Him [Jesus] all things hold together.”

In Jesus *all things hold together*. Why is this important? Well, because usually the world around us will tell us that we can keep our marriage together, our families going, our businesses growing, get good grades, excellent crops, or put food on the table if *we* work hard, if *we* take care of each other, if *we* study hard...if *we* do all we can. This is a half truth. It is not wrong...we do have to do our part, but a very important piece is missing! *The most important piece is missing*. This is like telling you this is a fantastic bicycle, but it has no chain, or this is an incredible electric car that can drive miles and miles without gas, but it has no battery! You might still be able to push your bicycle or your electric car, and you might still be able to get where you want to go, but my oh my, it will be hard, it will take long, it will make you sweat - it will be a struggle! Do you struggle to keep things going in your life? It could be because there is no chain, no battery - it could be because Jesus is missing! You see, it is *in Jesus* that *all things...hold together*. If Jesus is a part of everything, all relationships, all we do, all we work so hard for, it is like having the chain on the bicycle, the battery in the car...you will find things start to come together, start to actually work out! Amazing news, isn’t it!

Discussion 1 - JESUS!

What did you learn tonight about Jesus that might be different, new, or even just confirming what you have always known and believed?

Discussion 2 - In Jesus ALL things hold together

These are huge faith statements from Colossians 1:

- Jesus *is* God
- He created *even the invisible* (for example also love, joy, peace, hope...)
- It is only in Jesus that *all things hold together*.

How do you think these faith truths will shape your walk with the Lord from this day forward? For example: What might change, or what would stay the same in your life?

These are indeed a bit “heavier” questions - perhaps you might find it difficult to answer fully this very moment, but perhaps you can simply share one thought for now, and keep pondering this during the weeks to come.

Message 3: Col 1:24-2:5

The best Mystery ever...is out!

Everybody surely loves a great mystery, right! And if you know there is an incredible treasure included, you can hardly wait to find out what it might be. We'll stay glued to a movie screen to get to the bottom of a good mystery. We'll pay a lot for an invigorating escape room experience, where your group needs to unravel an intriguing mystery. Mysteries are great, and if they lead to a treasure on top of it all - that is simply the best ever!

So, let us follow the best Mystery ever, find the Treasure, and then tell the world about it!

- The Mystery - Col 1:26-27, "...the Mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this Mystery, which is Christ in you, the Hope of glory."

The Jewish leaders were hoping that the hidden Mystery of God was to restore on some glorious day the Jewish nation to once again be *the* nation, with all the divine and earthly fortunes and privileges attached to it. However, it came to light that:

- The Mystery is not about a timetable of *events* - it is about *someone*, Christ Jesus!
- The Mystery is not about *one* nation - it is about *all*, the *saints*, whether Jewish or Gentile!
- The Mystery is not about *earthly* restoration - it is about restoring *eternal* Hope of glory!
- The Mystery is not *hidden* anymore - on the *cross* it was displayed for the world to see!

The best Mystery ever...is out!

- The treasure - Col 2:2c-3, "...in order that they may know the Mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

This special Mystery of Christ holds incredible treasures! These treasures in Christ are giving us access to all the wisdom and knowledge we need. They are an eternal game changer. They help us to understand who God is, and how He wants us to live. These treasures make a life possible that leads to a glorious day before our God, where we can stand without fear, guilt and doubt, as we get ready to enter heaven for eternity - an eternal game changer indeed.

As wonderful as this may sound, it is important to notice the huge emphasis that Paul always put on this little word "IN". It is *in* Christ in whom these treasures are hidden. We all enjoy a treasure hunt, where a certain treasure map will lead to an incredible, life changing

treasure, hidden in a very specific treasure chest! In such a treasure hunt the map continues to stay incredibly important, often leading you to hold your breath whenever it seems that it might get stolen, ripped, or destroyed, as any of these would surely ruin the chances to find the treasure. Just as important would it be to find the exact spot as marked on the map - even though there might be many treasure chests out there, only one exact chest, hidden in one very specific spot will hold the glorious treasure.

Nobody can claim to have found *the* treasure by simply opening *any* treasure chest. No, you need to follow the treasure map to the *exact* treasure chest, which will hold *in only that specific* treasure chest, the *correct* treasure. Simply following *any map*, will lead to *some treasure*, which in turn will lead your life to...well, who knows where. Many people treat their faith journey like this. This is not wise, and cannot end well. *All the wisdom and knowledge* you need, the *entire treasure*, leading to a great, meaningful life, is found *only IN one Treasure Chest - CHRIST JESUS*.

- Tell the world - Col 1:24, 28-2:2, "Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of His body, which is the church...We proclaim Him [Jesus], admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me. I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the Mystery of God, namely, Christ..."

The Mystery, pointing to the best treasure ever, should not be kept a secret!

God wanted the Mystery out there, so the treasure would be accessible to all...*in Christ*.

Therefore it is no wonder that Paul laid everything on the line to make this Mystery known. He gives an example of how serious we should take it to share this life altering news with the world. His dedication to this cause despite suffering is both encouraging and challenging. Paul understands that persecution and suffering to make the Mystery of salvation in Christ known to all didn't stop with Jesus. This suffering continues throughout the life of the church, not only in sharing the Gospel Message of Christ, but also through living it out. There is suffering in living faithfully, in fighting temptation, in weakness and struggles simply as part of our humanity, and of course in sharing this Message to all.

Paul's example of carrying suffering is simply incredible: He is not only willing to suffer while living *in Christ, for Christ, by proclaiming Christ*. He is also rejoicing in the fact that he can *take a hit for the sake of the Church*: He would rather want affliction to hit his own body

first (““fill up in my flesh”), before it might strike Christ’s Body, His Church. Wow! *Rejoice in that*, and you know your faith has *found deep, deep roots*, and will *bear much, much fruit!*

What does Paul present to us as a goal?

- The world should *know* about the Mystery and the treasure it holds, *no matter the cost* to our own bodies and lives, and we should do this with *joy*.
- The world should not only know about this Mystery and its treasure, but we should also strive to “present everyone perfect in Christ”. It is not only about *proclaiming* Jesus, but also “*admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom*”.

Can such a goal be reached by yourself?

No!

This is a Mystery that God wanted to be made known.

This leads to a treasure that has eternal consequences.

This can only be presented...*with all Christ’s energy, which so powerfully works in us (Col 1:29)!*

Discussion 1 - A great Mystery with the best treasure ever!

What about this Mystery and its treasure have struck you the most? Why?

Discussion 2 - Embracing...*suffering*?!

Paul challenges us to look very differently at afflictions and suffering.
How are you dealing with this in your own life?

What did you find in this passage that could help us to turn this struggle into a joy?

Week 2

Jesus: Only He can connect us with God

Devotion - Monday

Read - Take a moment to listen as God speaks to you

Colossians 2:6-7

⁶So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, ⁷rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

Ponder - Take a moment to open your heart to what God wants to instill in you

Use any or all of these to help guide your thoughts:

- In a nutshell we encounter a *process of growth and development* for believers in these 2 verses. Ponder these 3 words in the light of such a process for yourself as a child of God:
 - Received
 - Continue
 - Overflowing
- To “*live in Him*” could also be translated as, “*walk with the Lord*”. Paul basically then continues to describe in verse 7 what such a “walk with the Lord” could look like. Read slowly through these 3 ways describing your “walk with God”, and ask yourself *which areas might require more attention* from you:
 - Rooted in Jesus
 - Built up in Jesus
 - Strengthened in your faith in Jesus
- *We have so much to be thankful for!* Take a jug, and put it in the sink. Now pour water in it, while you imagine this to be what you have always received from your Lord. Continue to fill the jug...now let it overflow while simply watching it for at least a minute doing that.
 - What emotion(s) did this awaken in you?
 - Now, imagine that the water filling the jug is the gratitude you have for what Christ has done for you over all of your life. Would a jug be sufficient to contain that? How do you now think about the meaning of a walk with the Lord that is “*overflowing with thankfulness*”?
- How does this passage encourage, challenge, or perhaps even change you?

Pray - Take a moment to share your heart with God

Journal - Take a moment to write down what is on your heart right now

NOTES

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, typical of notebook paper or a document template. There are no margins, text, or other markings present.

Devotion - Tuesday

Read - Take a moment to listen as God speaks to you

Colossians 2:8

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

Ponder - Take a moment to open your heart to what God wants to instill in you

First, let's have a little fun with words: In the Greek the word for "captive" is "*sylagōgein*". Even if you don't get the pronunciation quite right, you should be able to get a feel for how close this is to the word "*synagogue*", the place where the Jews would gather for teaching and worship. Paul is using a pun here between these two words. To what end? So that we can be warned how *easy it could be to have our thoughts fall into the trap of something that might actually sound and look good ("synagogues")*, but now could also bring with it some "*hollow and deceptive philosophy*"! Some Jewish believers did not want to let go of things like the circumcision or following all kinds of Jewish laws such as what to eat, or not to eat, to touch or not, and all kinds of other "human traditions".

Therefore, even though for years these synagogues were places where the Jews learned about God and the Messiah who was to come, this had sadly also become *a place now where you could fall sylagōgein (captive) to empty teachings, "hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world...rather than on Christ"*.

This is a scary warning: Sometimes a place / person / group could really look and sound so solid, however, one needs to be careful: *The words might deceive, the thoughts might be empty, and the accepted traditions might be human inventions.* We also need to remember, we are in a *spiritual battle* - there are unseen forces at work in this world that are constantly at work through worldly things and people, to bring about confusion and inspire false teaching.

- So, only one question to ponder for today: Is there anybody or anything, or any place, that you need to seriously reconsider listening to, attending, visiting...having a relationship with...or allowing it to be a part of your life?
- Well...perhaps a second, associative question: Is there anything you have picked up on in a friend or loved one's life that you need to share this warning with?

Pray - Take a moment to share your heart with God

Journal - Take a moment to write down what is on your heart right now

NOTES

[illegible]

Devotion - Wednesday

Read - Take a moment to listen as God speaks to you

Colossians 2:9-10

⁹ For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰ and you have been given fullness in Christ, Who is the Head over every power and authority.

Ponder - Take a moment to open your heart to what God wants to instill in you

- Write down 1 word or thought that came to you almost instantaneously as you read this.
- Paul reminds us that God is completely and continuously present in Jesus, also when Christ was born into humanity ("bodily form"). Now ponder this: If you say things like, "Jesus lives in me", "Jesus is in my heart", "I am in a personal relationship with Jesus", "Jesus sits on the throne of my heart" ...*if you truly recognize WHO this Jesus is...* what does this do to your heart, and how does it change your mindset?
- In the previous devotional we were warned that it is important to recognize that we are in a spiritual battle. That might seem scary and even overwhelming for a moment. However, if you now read in verse 10, if we put it in a bit more literal way, that you have been *filled up with Christ*, does this not *empower and encourage* you? How does it make you feel when you realize that when you met Christ He turned your life around. He got rid of everything about the old self, all the lies of inadequacy were thrown out, all the messes got cleaned out, and *then our Lord filled you up with the fullness He has in God, and with all He is as Head of every power and authority?*
- How does this passage encourage, challenge, or perhaps even change you?

Pray - Take a moment to share your heart with God

Journal - Take a moment to write down what is on your heart right now

NOTES

[illegible]

Devotion - Thursday

Read - Take a moment to listen as God speaks to you

Colossians 2:16-17

¹⁶ Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

Ponder - Take a moment to open your heart to what God wants to instill in you

What a powerful metaphor!

Would it not be so super weird if you walk up to your spouse or a friend and rather than giving them a hug, you fall on the floor and give their shadow just the biggest hug ever, and start a whole conversation with it?!

People would think: "Oh my goodness, you have completely lost all your marbles!"

Of course, how silly, nobody would do such a thing! Paul therefore uses this metaphor to make us think about religious rules and feasts, food, and laws on how to celebrate the Sabbath: *All of these are at best only a shadow of the One Who is real and truly holy.* It is all *only about Jesus*. He is the true contents of our faith. It is because of Him that we have a religion. *It is because of Him that we can see a "shadow", not the other way around!*

- Let us therefore carefully ponder our spiritual walk: Are there some "shadows" that we are "hugging"? *Have we made some things more important than Jesus?*
- What should we do if this has slowly crept into our walk with the Lord?

Pray - Take a moment to share your heart with God

Journal - Take a moment to write down what is on your heart right now

NOTES

[illegible]

Devotion - Friday

Read - Take a moment to listen as God speaks to you

Colossians 2:18

Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions.

Ponder - Take a moment to open your heart to what God wants to instill in you

- Underline 3 words that stuck out to you, and ponder why it did.

Paul shares two more warnings: Be careful who you listen to! Be careful who you follow!

It is only Christ that we should follow, and therefore only spiritual leaders/mentors/teachers/pastors who follow Christ first and above all. Paul says it well in 1 Corinthians 11:1, *"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ"*. In other words, if somebody truly follows Christ, you can follow them. And, if someone truly follows Christ what they say will be in alignment with the Words of Christ, as we find in God's Word and inspired through His Spirit. Therefore these would be words we can listen to. *Only God should be followed, and only He should be worshiped - remember, even angels are still only heavenly beings, created by God...they are not God.*

- Take a moment to think carefully about *people you follow, and people you listen to*. Does it seem like they are humble, but when they talk it is often more about *themselves*, all kinds of spiritual experiences *they* had, and all that *they* have learned? If they are not humble and talk more about the *Lord*, and what *He* is doing, what *He* actually said, and how we should *follow Him*, then this should be a huge red flag. Who do you listen to? Who do you follow? All good? If not...remember, *it is only Jesus who can connect us well with God!*
- How does this passage encourage, challenge, or perhaps even change you?

Pray - Take a moment to share your heart with God

Journal - Take a moment to write down what is on your heart right now

NOTES

[illegible]

Devotion - Saturday

Read - Take a moment to listen as God speaks to you

Colossians 2:19

He has lost connection with the Head, from Whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

Ponder - Take a moment to open your heart to what God wants to instill in you

- Underline 3 words that stuck out to you, and ponder why it did.

Following yesterday's devotion, Paul continues to share that people who say they are all about God, but they are actually only full of themselves, have "lost connection with the Head" to Whom all of us should stay attached to. Without attachment to the head a body cannot be fed, it cannot be directed, it will fall apart rather than function as a unit...let alone grow stronger!

- Let us take a moment to double check ourselves and those whom we follow: *Are we deeply connected to the Head, our Lord*, and do we recognize we are *not supposed to be functioning alone, but as part of a body*, held together and functioning as one unit in our Lord? What would one implication of this be for your life?
- There is *only one way to grow spiritually*, and that is *through God*! It is only He who grows us. *Reflect on this*: May I always remember that it is not my pastor, church, music, favorite author or book that grows me - growth happens because of my God and Him alone...God may use any or all of these in my life, but HE alone grows me in Jesus and His Spirit. Nobody else can claim this!
- When you think back on this week: What stood out to you more than anything else?
- When you think ahead to tomorrow: Be in prayer for God's servant to bring God's Message to God's people, and pray that the Holy Spirit will prepare and open your heart to receive this well.

Pray - Take a moment to share your heart with God

Journal - Take a moment to write down what is on your heart right now

NOTES

[illegible]

Sunday Evening Gathering

Message 1: Colossians 2:11-12

The OLD is totally gone - something NEW is here to stay!

Paul uses two powerful metaphors in these 2 short verses to share 2 incredible truths.

First metaphor: Circumcision

- Col 2:11, "In Him [Christ] you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ..."

Circumcision was an integral part of the Jewish religion and culture. Jewish families would be quick to recall God revealing Himself to Abram, and promising him not only a son in his old age, but an offspring of even greater in numbers than the stars in the sky, "Then the Word of the Lord came to him [Abram]: '... a son coming from your own body will be your heir...Look up at the heavens and count the stars - if indeed you can count them...So shall your offspring be.'" (Genesis 15:4-5)!

God continues to confirm this relationship between Abram, now 99 years old, and Himself as a covenant. God says, "I will establish My covenant as an everlasting covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you" (Genesis 17:7). A covenant that should be kept by God's people, and as a reminder all males should be circumcised - God said to Abram, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is My covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between Me and you." (Genesis 17:9-11).

Circumcision of the male flesh was therefore to be a sign of an incredibly intense commitment and lasting relationship between God and His people. *A physical action with a spiritual meaning*, well known to the Jewish people, that Paul now uses to also speak to us. However this time it has an even deeper meaning: It is now not simply another human doing the circumcision, it is Christ Himself! It is also *not a physical circumcision, but a spiritual action where Christ reaches into our souls and cuts out our "sinful nature"!*

Don't miss another powerful application of this circumcision metaphor: Just as the circumcised flesh of the 8 day old baby boy was *discarded off*, *Christ has the power to completely remove the fleshly and sinful nature* from our hearts! In Christ the old way of doing things can truly be completely removed. Through Christ's heart-circumcision there can be no doubt: *The old is totally gone!*

Second metaphor: Burial

- Col 2:12, "...having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead."

While the metaphor of Christ's circumcision is incredible it is as if Paul knows that we can so easily twist things to fit or please our old nature again. We might fall into the trap of thinking that only a "*portion*" of who we were as sinners were cut off, in the same way as only a "*portion*" of flesh is removed from an 8 day old baby during circumcision. So, what Paul does next is to let the metaphor of circumcision overlap with that of a burial. By doing so this quickly closes the door for misunderstanding the power of Christ's work: While the metaphor of circumcision helps us to understand that our sinful nature gets removed, the overlapping metaphor of burial helps us to realize that *all* of it is being removed, buried, and are thus *permanent!* This *spiritual circumcision done by Christ* is *changing all* of ourselves, *permanently*, just as you cannot only have a portion of yourself being buried, for a little bit, and then leave the grave again...in a physical sense. And yet, it is exactly this last statement, that we cannot "*leave the grave in a physical sense*", that begs for further explanation for us as Christians. You see, Paul reminds us that *we do not enter the grave alone* - we are buried "*with Him [Christ]*"! Of course this *changes the outcome!* Why? Because Christ has proven that *He has power of death* and can be *raised victoriously* even from the grave. So, in the words of verse 12 this means that you can now also be "*raised with Him [Christ] through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead*"!

Finally, Paul wraps it up with tying it all together in *baptism*. Even where baptisms were practiced outside of Christianity in other ancient settings, it always functioned as an identity marker, as well as an exit-entry ritual. Getting baptized showed that you have now left a certain group/religion, and have decided to identify with a different group/religion. You were now *totally out of something old*, and have *completely entered something new!* To pull it all together: In baptism we identify with Christ, who cut out our sinful nature through a spiritual circumcision of the heart and soul, and by entering with our crucified Lord into the grave we completely die to our old self, so that through the power of the risen Lord we can exit the life of the old self, and now enter a life of something completely new in and through our Lord and Savior!

Circumcision - burial - baptism...all working together to share one, powerful message: In Christ the entire old self is gone, and we have now entered a life with a new identity in Christ, forever!

Dig deeper section

Another passages from Paul in Romans 6:1-7 is worth reading alongside Colossians 2:12. Here Paul also confirms that we cannot simply continue sinning as we please because we have been saved by grace in Christ. Except for circumcision, baptism and burial metaphors, Paul even pulls in the metaphor of slavery to confirm: We cannot be slaves to sin, we now have a new life, freed from sin!

¹ What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. ⁵ If we have been united with Him like this in His death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin — ⁷ because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

Romans 6:1-7

Discussion 1

Many help us care for our bodies - only One can take care of our souls

Many people often work hard at taking good care of our bodies. When our hair is in a mess, we are quick to make a hair appointment; when our teeth need cleaning we make sure to go for dental care; when we are sick, we understand that going to the doctor sooner rather than later is probably best, and when we feel our safety is threatened we will call 911 in seconds. Let's hear, what have you done, or to whom have you reached out to in the past weeks to take good care of your body?

We probably all realize that we also need to take care of our souls. Do you agree that it is impossible for ourselves or someone else to reach into our souls and clean out our sin? Have you thought about it yet, like we shared in this message: Only Jesus can truly take care of our souls?

Therefore the question that I often ponder: If we know we need to call a dentist when our tooth ache is just unbearable, and if we realize only Jesus can reach into our souls to get it cleaned out and restored - why do you think some people still struggle to reach out to Jesus?

Discussion 2 - Progress for Christ is possible, starting today!

This message has helped us to understand that Paul is using the powerful metaphors of circumcision, and being buried in baptism, to illustrate in our lives a total break with sin, and a complete introduction of a new life with the Lord.

Once we understand this radical change that comes when Christ enters our lives, would you say that we should be able to see some progress, already *now*, in our spiritual lives?

If Jesus is the One who executed this change in our lives, do you think we can still come up with a bunch of excuses for simply constantly sliding back into our old sinful lives?

Therefore...how does this message change your outlook on the possibility of positive progress in your spiritual life, *starting today*?

Message 2: Colossians 2:13-15

VICTORIOUS in Jesus!

Many believers struggle to live truly victoriously in Jesus. The devil is really good at attacking our thoughts with feelings of *guilt or inadequacy*, thus leaving us powerless for the sake of the Kingdom. We continue to hide in our cloak of guilt, and watch from afar as others serve due to our filter of inadequacy.

Yet, what *Christ* has done for us is supposed to *unleash a powerful life* where we can step up and step out in victory over sin and fear, and cross barriers of guilt and inadequacy so that we can reach the lost, and bring hope to the brokenhearted!

This is what Colossians 2:13-15 is all about - 3 powerful verses about victory in Jesus:

- Col 2:13a-b, “When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ.”

“When you were dead in your sins...” - wow, how incredible that God came looking for us when we were completely lost, dirty with our sins, in fact struggling to breathe underneath a pile of sin...dying. We were still dealing with sin stuck to our bodies so tight and close, as our own flesh covers us up. Sin was not cut away, we were not yet “circumcised” by Christ - our sinful nature was still glued to us! To say it plainly with Paul: We were not only lost, we were *dead* in our sins!

This is the incredible God we serve: He loves us so much that He reaches out and finds us when we are lost, when we have given up on ourselves, when we feel powerless...living pointless lives as if forever stuck in a “Walking dead” movie.

This is absolutely not the life our God wants for us - so He reaches out and makes us *alive with Christ*. He brings us back to true life, to a new start...a life that begins in victory with the risen Lord!

Victorious in Jesus...starting from the darkest pit of despair!

- Col 2:13c-14, “He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; He took it away, nailing it to the cross.”

If there is something that we all probably struggle with it is to feel very quickly that we’ve been wronged, and that someone should apologize. Funny how it often takes us much

longer though to recognize that *we have wronged someone else*, and should *offer an apology*. And...even if we do manage to receive, or extend an apology, it is almost just as difficult, if not more so, to say these powerful three words, "*I forgive you*". Words that could change someone's life significantly. Words that could free them from a ton of guilt, allow them to breathe again, and have fear flee from them to make way for peace and joy.

Perhaps the time has come that we learn from the Best. Perhaps we should learn from how our Lord has done it: *Offering unconditional forgiveness* when we were at our worst, busy with the worst, and didn't deserve any forgiveness, as we couldn't even utter an apology that would be worth receiving forgiveness! We've broken every law, we've violated every "written code with its regulations" - we've failed to put God always first, we've been angry to the point of wanting to commit murder, jealous, horrible to our parents, failed to keep God's Day holy, and lusted after others. Our sins were stacked so high that it was like a mountain of debt piled up against us. A debt that became impossible to pay, a debt so devastating that it completely prevented us to make things right with God *on our own*.

But God...don't you just love these two words!

But God showed up in Jesus, and in the most costly, sacrificial way imaginable took our *debt* of sin and guilt...*He took it all upon Him*, and then allowed it all to be *nailed to the cross...in Him, with Him...spiritually and physically...through Him! Complete debt forgiveness*. A clean bill. Undeserved, grace-filled, costly, sacrificial, and complete forgiveness of all our sin. Total victory in Jesus - *He paid it all!*

Victorious in Jesus...starting with a clean bill due to complete forgiveness!

- Col 2:15, "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."

Jesus did not only *find* us.

Jesus did not only *clean* us up.

Jesus also *lifted* us up!

In the background of this verse is imagery of the Roman generals returning from war with huge festivals as they would enter Rome victoriously to please Caesar and the citizens of Rome. Dressed up in their best outfits generals, their sons, officials, and soldiers would proudly enter the city under shouts of joy, music, and a wonderful fragrance of flowers, incense and even perfume. They would surround the captured enemy (the king, officials, soldiers and slaves), all chained together, sometimes even naked, walking towards a dreadful ending!

Paul reminds us here in Colossians 2:15 that in a similar way *Jesus had victory over all powers and authorities* of this world and all the evil in it. *At the cross* Jesus publicly showed that He has the *ultimate power*, when He died and rose again from this death! He surely made a “public spectacle” of all who marched up to make war against Him. No power or authority could hold Him down. He died, He rose, He ascended to heaven, He sits on His throne, and here is the best of it all: *Everyone who puts their faith in Jesus are invited to join in this triumph!* We celebrate with and in His victory! We now have *nothing to fear* anymore! Who would live in fear, run away, hide, or get a huge scare from an evil groan of a...*chained...naked...enemy?!*

Are you tired of living in fear? Are you sick of being powerless? Are you ready for a change?

It all starts at the cross. It starts with putting our faith in Jesus. *It starts at the cross.*

This is where we *leave* the darkest pit of despair.

This is where we *receive* unconditional forgiveness.

This is where we *share* in the triumph of Christ.

This is how we start to live victoriously in Jesus!

Discussion 1 - Jesus finds us, forgives us, and have us join in His victory!

These are 3 amazing verses with 3 incredibly powerful thoughts:

- Jesus *finding* us in the mud pool of sin (v. 13)
- Jesus *forgiving* us *completely* (v. 14), and
- Jesus letting us *walk with Him in victory* through this life (v. 15)

Which of these 3 thoughts made the largest impression on your heart and why?

Feel free to include an example from your life if you could.

Discussion 2 - The devil's weapon of guilt against a victorious life in Christ

Reflect for 2 minutes on the first paragraph from this message, now that you've finished this study on Colossians 2:13-15 -

Many believers struggle to live truly victoriously in Jesus. The devil is really good at attacking our thoughts with feelings of guilt or inadequacy, thus leaving us powerless for the sake of the Kingdom. We continue to hide in our cloak of guilt, and watch from afar as others serve due to our filter of inadequacy.

What stirred in your heart? Only share what you are comfortable with.

Message 3: Colossians 2:20-23

Choose Christ...*not empty customs and rules!*

Let's read Col 2:20-21, "Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 'Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!'"?

Why is it that sometimes even though we should know better, or started out well, it doesn't take long before we find ourselves heading down a dangerous path? Is it not because we are often so easily influenced by different voices, lose focus in the busyness, or get our sights set on the wrong goal posts.

Let's take a moment to think carefully about this strange behavior, which as you might agree, happens way too often...sadly so.

First, we realize that we need to give our lives to Christ, and so we do! Praise God! When this happens, Paul says, you die with Christ to the way the world wants you to do things. You now want nothing to do anymore with false and empty religious rules that have lost its meaning. *If it meant nothing for Jesus, then why should it mean anything for us?* So, when you found life in Christ, was the day that you have *set your sights on Jesus and Him alone*. You recognized that you are now a citizen of another Kingdom, and *everything you do should flow from these Kingdom's principles*, not the principles of this worldly kingdom. In fact, you could say you are now dead to this worldly kingdom and its way of building empty, meaningless lives.

This all makes perfect sense, doesn't it?

Then we should be stunned like Paul if we have come to a place, after finding life in Christ, where we start to submit again to all kinds of empty religious customs and rules, listening to worldly people making worldly rules: Wait, do not eat that...be careful, do not touch that!

Should we not submit to Christ and life in Him? Why should we submit to worldly rules again?

Do we not realize that "These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings" (Col 2:22)? Do we not realize that all these rules and customs have been fabricated by mere men, by their own ideas and teachings, and *calling it "religion" does not mean that it now suddenly holds true life that will last*. In fact, if you could keep an eye on these manmade rules for long enough you will find that at some point it absolutely will perish, because everything in this world is destined to come to an end after it's used for a while. *Nothing that is a part of this world is meant to last*. It will come to an end, an empty, meaningless ending.

Is it not funny, in a horrifically sad sense, how easily the *devil can fool us to let worldly things shine so bright* that it looks as if it is alive, as if it has worth. Yet, may the Holy Spirit reveal to us the truth: "Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence" (Col 2:23).

May we remember, the food that is so "holy" or "unworthy" that we should not eat it will soon lay rotten on the ground, and will be thrown out with the trash. These regulations might sound so wise, but it has been made up by mere humans. The same goes for people who often seem so humble, and it might look as if they are so strict on themselves to do better - yet, if you just wait around for a while you will notice that none of this behavior/ rules has the power to stop them from sinning. They continue to indulge in fleshly desires...jealousy, sensuality, anger, and more. *Not one portion of this self-made religion can lead to genuine holiness, to a life set apart for the Lord.*

What alone can help us to get it right, stay on the path, and finish well?

ONLY JESUS!

Choose Christ...not empty customs and rules.

Listen only to the voice of the Holy Spirit, and do not get confused by other worldly voices.

Do not fill your life with religious busyness. Fill your life with a continuous search in God's Word for His truth and His wisdom.

Set your sights on the true Goal Posts of grace, complimented with a life of sacrificial love and service.

Choose Christ...every day, everywhere, every time.

Discussion 1 - Religious rules and customs

Do you or some of your Christian family or friends sometimes get caught up in all kinds of religious rules or customs - perhaps even unintentionally - and if so, can you name some examples?

Discussion 2 - Finding the way back, and staying on track!

Once one got caught up in empty religious behavior, *what is the way back?*

Try and identify what we should do to *prevent* this backsliding into empty religious rules and customs, and enable us to rather *stay on track*. See if you can come up with *very practical steps* to take, with step one of course being...“Get back to Jesus”!

- Step one: Get back to Jesus
- Step two: _____
- Step three: _____
- Step four: _____

Anything else you would like to add or share?

Week 3

Jesus: Only He is worth living for

Devotion - Monday

Read - Take a moment to listen as God speaks to you

Colossians 3:5-6

⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

Ponder - Take a moment to open your heart to what God wants to instill in you

Use any or all of these to help guide your thoughts:

- Time to go to WAR. Paul is not sharing a soft suggestion here. He is not playing around with some sort of a sin that needs to be addressed in our lives, and neither should we! Paul is using *war imagery* to challenge us: “Put to death” these sinful things flowing from your “earthly nature”, or else says Paul, the “wrath of God” will be heading your way! Therefore, let us take this extremely seriously. Take a moment - STOP - PRAY so you can focus clearly.
- Now, REFLECT with the utmost honesty - which of these sins are in your life:
 - *Sexual immorality* (sexual relations and actions outside of the boundaries God has set).
 - *Impurity* (impure thoughts that often spill over into actions with horrible consequences).
 - *Lust* (hearts and minds that are filled with terrible sexual desires).
 - *Evil desires* (constantly longing for what is sinful and wrong).
 - *Greed* (enough is never enough...stuff has become an idol, as all available time and energy are poured into this).
- Next, GO TO WAR - pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to face these in all honesty in the presence of God. Confess it. Ask for forgiveness. Let Jesus’ death on the cross put this sinful nature in your life to death. *Today is the day to conquer this, and have victory over it in the Name of Jesus.* Today is the day to stop the wrath of God from destroying you, and rather receive the mercy of God, due to the costly intervention and sacrifice of our Lord.
- These are two incredibly serious verses. However, if you walked in honesty and repentance through these verses you should actually feel so *relieved, renewed, blessed* right now?

How do you feel? As if you went through a battle? Remember, in Christ you are also the victor! Be encouraged, be inspired, *be...new...in the Lord!*

Pray - Take a moment to share your heart with God

Journal - Take a moment to write down what is on your heart right now

NOTES

[illegible]

Devotion - Tuesday

Read - Take a moment to listen as God speaks to you

Colossians 3:7-8

⁷You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.

Ponder - Take a moment to open your heart to what God wants to instill in you

Paul challenges us in these 2 verses to *stop anything bad that we have become accustomed to* as children of God, and create with the help of the Holy Spirit *new pathways that honor God*. He references some examples of bad behaviors that could have become an all too familiar part of our lives: A bad temper, wanting to start a fight about everything, to be revengeful, and not caring about how hurtful and disrespectful our language has become to God and others.

Now, let us try and be very honest with ourselves, as we ponder the following:

- Which of these (and other) issues of the heart and mouth need to be cleaned up in your life? Which of these *bad habits need to stop*?
- What are some *new habits* that you would like to start?
- How would you describe some of the *new pathways* you'd like to create that will reflect better Who is walking alongside you, and make it just a bit clearer where you are heading towards.

Pray - Take a moment to share your heart with God

Journal - Take a moment to write down what is on your heart right now

NOTES

[illegible]

Devotion - Wednesday

Read - Take a moment to listen as God speaks to you

Colossians 3:9-10

⁹Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

Ponder - Take a moment to open your heart to what God wants to instill in you

- Write down 1 word or thought that came to you almost instantaneously as you read this. Why do you feel this struck you so deeply and quickly?

Paul uses different metaphors to challenge us to let go of our old lives:

- During our Monday devotion he used a *war metaphor* to tell us how seriously we should take the fight against sin in our lives.
- Yesterday Paul used the *metaphor of changing paths* that we have become accustomed to, to ensure that we are on a path where God can proudly walk alongside us.
- Today Paul is using a *metaphor from our clothing closets*. We are to remove our old clothes of a sinful nature, and put on clothes from God's store. A clothing line created by our God will easily reflect the Image of its Creator!
- Which of these 3 metaphors do you find the most helpful to remind you of how important it is to leave an old life driven by a sinful nature behind, and following a life that reflects God the best? Or, do you feel that each metaphor contributes something different that is helpful to you - if so, describe what you mean with an example or two if possible.

Pray - Take a moment to share your heart with God

Journal - Take a moment to write down what is on your heart right now

NOTES

[illegible]

Devotion - Thursday

Read - Take a moment to listen as God speaks to you

Colossians 3:11

Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Ponder - Take a moment to open your heart to what God wants to instill in you

This is the truth:

- God shows no favoritism.
 - It doesn't matter to God whether you have known Him for a long time (like the Jews did), or only a short while (like the Greeks did in Jesus' time).
 - It doesn't matter to God if you have had certain Godly rituals / customs (like circumcision) in your life for a long time, or not.
 - It doesn't matter to God if you can read or write, whether you are refined / civil or a bit rough around the edges (like what was known in Paul's time as "barbarian", or people like the Scythians from the northern Asian regions).
 - It doesn't matter to God whether you are very important, or almost unseen in the community (as was the case with "slave or free" in the time of Jesus and Paul).
- Which of the above truths have the devil perhaps *twisted against you* in your walk towards, or even with, the Lord? Has the devil in other words bended some of these truths into lies that you have started to believe? Have you for example come to believe that you are not good enough, not powerful enough, not smart enough that God would care about you?
- One last phrase to ponder for the day, "*Christ is all, and is in all*". How does this make you feel? Wow...all that God wants to know is not who and what you are, but *is Christ in your life* - *is Christ at the center of all in your life*? If He is, then who and what you are will be completely acceptable to God! Is this not great news?!

Pray - Take a moment to share your heart with God

Journal - Take a moment to write down what is on your heart right now

NOTES

[illegible]

Devotion - Friday

Read - Take a moment to listen as God speaks to you

Colossians 3:12

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Ponder - Take a moment to open your heart to what God wants to instill in you

- What does it mean to you to be called by God as someone who is "chosen", "holy" or "dearly loved"? Which of these resonates the best with you and why?

Paul challenges us to wear clothes that will show we are children of God. These "clothes" shows more of *who we are*, than where we shop... It shows that you are:

- *Compassionate* - that you know how to care for people.
 - *Kind* - that you know when to be a bit softer with people than the world would be.
 - *Humble* - that you know how to stay in your place, and don't think too much about yourself.
 - *Gentle* - that you know how to treat people with great care, rather than being harsh and abrasive.
 - *Patient* - that you know how to give an extra minute of your time, go an extra mile, or give someone another chance.
- Which of these pieces of "clothing" do you wear well, and which do you need to switch out for something new from your Father's store?
 - What about this passage was the most challenging for you?

Pray - Take a moment to share your heart with God

Journal - Take a moment to write down what is on your heart right now

NOTES

[illegible]

Devotion - Saturday

Read - Take a moment to listen as God speaks to you

Colossians 3:13-14

¹³ Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Ponder - Take a moment to open your heart to what God wants to instill in you

Paul is surely not aiming for second best! This whole week he's been challenging us with leaving all kinds of bad habits, terrible sinful acts of thought / word / deed, wrong values and perceptions, hurtful intentions, and wrong emotions behind us, and embracing a lifestyle that fits somebody that is holy, chosen and dearly loved by God! In different ways, with different metaphors, and from different angles Paul has been coming at us with the same Message: *Leave the old behind, and embrace in Christ the new*, so that in the end you will be *all about Christ*, and therefore *reflecting the Image of God!*

Today Paul adds: *God looked past your mistakes, and was able to forgive you. So, should you and I not be willing to do the same?!*

- *Take a moment to sit in this: "Bear with each other", "forgive whatever grievances you may have", "forgive as the Lord forgave you". Where are you at with these 3 challenging, spiritual requirements? Doing this could bring so much peace and joy to your life. Your heart could be light again, and your heart could be filled with joy again. Is it not time to let go of the grudges...to forgive? Is this not what the Lord has done for you? How about you follow His example...and let healing come?*

A gift is never complete without a great wrapping and a beautiful bow. For Paul all of these virtues that we've been talking about all week needs to be wrapped up and tied together with LOVE - Love is "which binds them all together in perfect unity"! *Let us embrace God's Love that changed everything, forever!*

- When you think back on this week: What stood out to you more than anything else?
- When you think ahead to tomorrow: Be in prayer for God's servant to bring God's Message to God's people, and pray that the Holy Spirit will prepare and open your heart to receive this well.

Pray - Take a moment to share your heart with God

Journal - Take a moment to write down what is on your heart right now

NOTES

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Sunday Evening Gathering

Message 1: Colossians 3:1-4

Now you look at Christ - soon you'll look with Christ at yourself!

¹ Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right Hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, Who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Colossians 3:1-4

Since we have been raised with Christ out of an old life, into a new life (v. 1a), we now have to acknowledge and implement several amazing truths in our lives:

- Christ is the most important One - He is the One at the right Hand of God (v. 1c).

This means that Christ becomes our new Center, our new *Point of Orientation*. Up to this point when we “have been raised with Christ” other things or people might have been in the center of our lives, and therefore we have orientated our lives to serve that “center”. Our drive, energy, resources would all have been directed to further what was in the center, but this has now changed - we have a new “Center”. And this time it is not just “a” center, it is *the Center - the most important, the one and only Center*. Jesus now becomes the Point of Orientation of literally everything we are, and attempt to be, or achieve.

- Our “hearts” and our “minds” should be focused, set firmly upon the “things above” (vv. 1b, 2).

We now look at Christ, and Christ alone with all we have. We make ourselves completely (physically, emotionally and spiritually) available *to only Him to direct our entire being* to serve Him wholeheartedly. We do not get stuck in earthly things, but direct our hearts and minds to Christ, so that we can then effectively *bring His agenda into these earthly things, rather than letting earthly things become our agenda*.

- What might seem “hidden” now (v. 3), will “appear with Him [Christ] in glory” (v. 4)!

What we are in Christ has already been activated. We are already new. The old is already gone. While we are still in this world, it may be “hidden” from the physical eye “who” we actually are, and “where” we actually are. However, that we have been raised from an old

life into a new, and are now belonging to Christ is guaranteed by God Himself: *We are already now “with Christ in God” (v. 3)!* And although this truth might be “hidden” for now from the physical eye, it will soon, at the second coming of our Lord, be out in the open, and available for all to see when *we appear in glory with Christ, as He appears in glory!*

These truths about our new lives in Christ call upon us to *stop wasting our time on earthly things that are not important to Jesus*. It challenges us to prioritize well, and let our time be filled with things that are important to our Lord. We need to remember our values, our interests and our lifestyles have all become new, and are driven now from a new Point of Orientation. To say it differently: *Let us live already now, as if we’re looking at our own lives from Christ’s view point*, because it is guaranteed that one day we *will* be looking at what we said and did *from this heavenly view point!* This way, if that day arrives, and we look at our own lives from Christ’s perspective, we would not have to face a terrifying surprise.

This passage surely makes one think of the warning Jesus gave in Matthew 7:21-23.

21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only He who does the will of My Father Who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your Name, and in Your Name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ 23 Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!’”

Matthew emphasizes that life is surely about *finding Jesus*, but then as Paul says, it is also about *making Jesus your Point of Orientation in everything you say and do*. It’s not only about acknowledging Jesus in heaven, it is about letting everything your heart and mind ponder and do become a reflection of a life hidden with Christ in God! I’m not sure if there is any better, or more powerful, way to say it than once more in the words of Paul (v. 4b):

“When Christ, WHO IS YOUR LIFE, appears...”!

Our lives (should) become the life of Christ!

When people look at us, they should see...Christ...in...us!

Discussion 1 - Who/what determines how we spend our TIME

Time is precious, and once lost, it is lost forever. What are some of the things that you think people waste their time on - things that are temporary and worldly, that will pass without adding much meaning to their lives? How would looking at what fills your time change, once Christ becomes your Point of Orientation?

Discussion 2 - CHRIST, WHO IS YOUR LIFE...

Take a moment to read the final paragraph of this message again.

Colossians 3:4b, "When Christ, *WHO IS YOUR LIFE*, appears..."

Our lives (should) become the life of Christ!

When people look at us, they should see...Christ...in...us!

What stirs in you when you read this? What does this challenge you to do next?

Message 2: Colossians 3:15-17

Let our lives be a “THANK YOU” to Jesus!

Choose peace.

Paul encourages believers to quickly choose *peace* when they get stuck with one another (v. 15a):

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace”.

As believers we need to remember that we are part of *one body*, and just as it is impossible to function effectively if different parts of your body would be in discord with each other, *we hurt our own purpose as a church tremendously if we cannot get along with one another*. Imagine if your hand would suddenly refuse to bring food to your mouth, because it is upset with it, or your feet intentionally slows down as they are frustrated that they need to be on the ground all the time, or your stomach rejects all the food, because it is tired of functioning in the background... It would be chaos! *A body at “war” with itself is a lost cause*, a disaster, a dysfunctional mess that won’t accomplish much, and soon collapse on itself.

This would be the church, the body of Christ, if we cannot *choose peace* when we get upset or frustrated with each other. We are *called to peace*, and if the “peace of Christ rules in our hearts” we will be able to do exactly that. And when we choose peace, we choose for a healthy body (church), that can be effective and actually make a difference to God’s glory!

Be thankful.

Being thankful is presented in crescendo style from vv. 15b to 17.

- The encouragement comes in v. 15b, “And be thankful”.
- The challenge gradually increases when we learn that being “thankful” is more than simply “saying” it - it should come *from our hearts and spill out in songs* of gratitude, “...and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God” (v. 16b).
- Finally, the peak of this crescendo is that “being thankful” means to *live it out in word and deed*, “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the Name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (v. 17)!

So, if the *peak of being “thankful” means to “live a thank you” life to Jesus*, how do we reach this goal? The answer is in the middle of this great passage, v. 16a,

“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom”.

To say it differently: *Look at the building plan before you build!* In our neighborhood we’ve had two empty lots on both sides of our home for years. Suddenly though two homes are being built on both the lots next to us - same style, same time, same builders. But there is something else they have in common: In both cases not a single thing happened before they didn’t carefully look at the building plans. I could see them from early morning walking around with big pieces of paper with the building plans printed on. Carefully things would be measured out, marked, and strong pegs would be hammered into the ground so that no mistakes could be made - everything had to start *exactly as the building plans* required. Nothing was left to chance, different interpretations, or change - the plan trumped it all. The plan was followed to a T.

As children of God, the “*Word of Christ*” has become our *building plan*. We have to remember that this “plan” has been drawn up by God Himself in heaven. This is not open to our own interpretation, change, updates, alterations... *This plan is the best. It is fixed. It is eternal.* It simply needs to be carried out. Our lives need to be built exactly as it says. It should *richly dwell in us*, influencing the way we *think and do*, and even the way we *teach and admonish* one another. This should be our *source of wisdom*, this is the paradigm from which we live, teach and lead. *This plan IS the plan!*

Using this plan as THE one and only plan will lead to a life that showcases, “Thank you Jesus”!

Discussion 1 - Choose peace

Who doesn't struggle to *always* live in *peace* with everybody - even fellow believers? Probably all of us - I know I do! Colossians challenges us though to aim for peace, also within our church families.

What are some examples of struggles amongst believers that you have noticed, and how did that make you feel?

What is some practical advice you can share, so we can do better to "choose peace" when we get a little stuck with each other?

Discussion 2 - Live a "Thank you" to Jesus

To be thankful to Jesus - Colossians encourages us to *say it, sing it, think it, live it!*

If you think about it for a minute, how would you say we are doing as a church family? Where in this "crescendo" style of being thankful are we: Are we more heavily invested in the "saying", "singing", "thinking" or "living" stage?

Let us hear it: What are you most grateful for today? (Try to cover, as a group, examples of a physical, emotional and spiritual nature, and not only of our own lives, but also from our life as a church family.)

Message 3: Colossians 3:18-4:1

Our Lord - our Groom, our Father, our Boss

How we perceive people will almost always change the way we listen to them, follow them, and respond to them. Let's imagine you are in a conversation where you don't know the people. Someone shares a medical issue they are struggling with, and people start to share their opinions, but one person shares quite a bit of detail and offers a stronger opinion of how to treat this. You walk away from the conversation wondering which of these options should be the best to follow. As the evening progresses you discover that the person who gave the most detailed opinion is actually a highly respected and experienced physician. Of course, this is a game changer! Suddenly it is almost a non-issue whose advice should be followed, and you will most probably not only listen to this doctor differently in the future, but also treat him/her with more respect.

It seems that we have slowly drifted in our society to a place where Jesus has too often become "one amongst several leaders" to whom we could listen, or even of whom we could follow. It lately caught my eye that if you would quote a Proverb or a saying of Jesus on let's say Facebook you might get a few likes, and perhaps even a comment or two. However, quote some famous person, believer, or missionary and you'll get a ton of likes/comments. Perhaps this is just me, and of course I haven't tested it with a large group of people... However, the warning stays the same: May we never shift to a place where even great believers, missionaries, world leaders, successful and powerful people's quotes/sayings/perspectives are receiving higher value on whatever level of life, than that of JESUS. *Jesus* always needs to have the *first and final say in every area of life!* Any other advice, wisdom, insight from whomever else always need to be secondary and subject to change/improvement depending on how it relates to the absolute truth, position and role of our Lord, Christ Jesus.

This needs to be at the heart of all our relationships in life. Paul uses some of our core relationships as examples of this truth when addressing the church in Colossae. From the areas of marriage, family and work the Colossian believers should see that *nothing works as well as it could if Christ is not acknowledged, respected, and followed as the only One in control of it.*

- Jesus needs to be the One to whom wives actually submit to in marriage. Then submitting to their husbands will not only be possible, but it will also happen in the correct, spiritual perspective, as it was intended.
- Husbands should first think about how Christ would react, and then treat their wives accordingly.
- Children should remember who their actual Father is, which will make obedience to their earthly parents so much easier and better.

- In turn, fathers should first be asking how Christ, as the heavenly Father of their children, would lead the kids, and then do the same.
- Employers and employees (“masters” and “slaves” in the setting of Colossae) should be careful how they treat one another, and how they do their jobs (whether it is leading or following), as they should both remember that Jesus as the actual “Boss”, is the true “Master in heaven”. Both “master and slave” should remember *they both serve the same, true Master!*

Take the time now to read slowly through Colossians 3:18-4:1, thinking about Jesus in each scenario as the true “Groom, Father, and Boss”:

¹⁸ Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

²¹ Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

²² Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. ²⁵ Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.

^{4:1} Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

Discussion 1 - Position of Jesus in our society

It does seem that we live in a society where the life lessons and advice we receive from Jesus are shifting from “most important” to “somewhat important”.

If you agree with this statement, would you be able to give some examples to support your opinion?

What are some of the pitfalls/dangers that this could potentially bring to our lives?

Discussion 2 - Doing marriage, family and work well

The world offers a ton of advice on marriage, raising kids and doing well in our jobs. See if your group can come up with some advice that the world (not God / Bible) offer on these life issues. How is this working out for us?

Now, Colossians’ advice is to remember that in marriage, family and career Jesus is our true “Groom, Father and Boss” - how did this encourage, challenge, or change how you would like to continue as a husband / wife in marriage, a father / mother with your kids, or a boss / employee at work?

Week 4

Jesus: Only He - the world should know!

Devotion - Monday

Read - Take a moment to listen as God speaks to you

Colossians 4:7-9

⁷Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. ⁸I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. ⁹He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.

Ponder - Take a moment to open your heart to what God wants to instill in you

Use any or all of these to help guide your thoughts:

- Pick three words/phrases that really struck you. Why did these make such an impact on you?

Tychicus is not only the carrier of this letter to the Colossae church, but also the one to *inform the believers of what is happening in Paul's life, and in the church in general*. Look again at v. 8, "I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts". Do you also sometimes feel like me, that you don't want to bother others with what all is going on in your life - perhaps even (especially) about spiritual things? Well, Paul follows another strategy: He realizes if the church knows about him in detail (his physical situation, but also his heart for them and the Lord) he would then be better supported. Furthermore, this could also be an encouragement to his fellow believers.

- How does this change your perspective on *sharing your life and heart with other believers*?

As we know from Paul's letter to Philemon, Onesimus came to Christ, and it is fairly certain that Paul is sending this letter now too with Tychicus to Philemon, who most probably lived in Colossae, where he had oversight over a house-church. It is awesome to notice how it is *not only important for Paul that people find Life in Christ, but also be integrated into their new life in the Christian family!*

- Are there some people that the Lord is laying on your heart to put a greater effort into *making them truly feel a part of the family of believers*?

Pray - Take a moment to share your heart with God

Journal - Take a moment to write down what is on your heart right now

NOTES

[illegible]

Devotion - Tuesday

Read - Take a moment to listen as God speaks to you

Colossians 4:10

My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)

Ponder - Take a moment to open your heart to what God wants to instill in you

- Do you have people in your life who really know you? Fellow believers who truly know your heart, and others close to you who are even going through the same struggles as you? We'll probably all agree that *Paul was a formidable, faith hero. Now, if Paul made certain to inform people of what is going on in his life and faith journey, and also stayed close to people literally experiencing what he is going through, like his fellow prisoner, Aristarchus, then that should tell us something. It should encourage us to not try and carry things we are going through by ourselves.* To let people in, and to lean on believers going through the same struggles as you. *This is not a weakness.* This is acknowledging that you are part of the body of our Lord, a team of believers, a family of brothers and sisters who can be a huge support and encouragement to you! *Reach out! Lean on! Stay strong!*

We notice this style of *team work* even in how Paul encourages the church to welcome Mark, because he is also connected to the same church family. In fact, Paul had a bit of a rough patch in ministry with Mark in the past (read about it in Acts 15:37-39), but this shows that they were also able to make peace again with each other, as believers should, and could *move on as they were indeed running the same race!*

- Have you perhaps hit a *rough patch with a believer* at some point? How is this relationship doing now? If it is still broken, why don't you take the time to follow Paul and Mark's example, and *fix this relationship* for the sake of all of us running on the same team, in the same race!
- Is there something *heavy on your heart* today? Why don't you take it to the *Lord*, and even share it with a *fellow believer*? You are truly not alone, and don't have to carry things alone.

Pray - Take a moment to share your heart with God

Journal - Take a moment to write down what is on your heart right now

NOTES

[illegible]

Devotion - Wednesday

Read - Take a moment to listen as God speaks to you

Colossians 4:11

Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my fellow workers for the Kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me.

Ponder - Take a moment to open your heart to what God wants to instill in you

As we continue through the greeting list in this final chapter of Colossians we get to know Jesus. Having the same common name as many other Jews, and to distinguish him from Jesus, our Lord, it is added that this “Jesus” was also called “Justus”. We also learn that Justus, together with Aristarchus and Mark, were in Paul’s mind the only three *Jewish* Christians who truly worked alongside him amongst the Gentiles in this area. In other words, *even though they were still following some of the Jewish customs they did understand that following Christ trumps all*, and therefore they should work together, shoulder to shoulder, as “fellow workers for the Kingdom of God”. This was a comfort to Paul in ministry as many others did not look at things in this manner (as we notice even from the first recorded church council meeting in Jerusalem where some Jewish Christians had a hard time letting go of what should “also” be required from the Gentile Christians - read Acts 15)!

- Can you think of some people in your own life who are *Christians*, but they view some things (*that are not in the core of our faith*) a little different? They might have a different way of doing church, of worshiping, or even follow some customs/traditions/rituals that are not part of what you do. Have you considered that these might not need to divide you? There could be *a bridge to still do ministry together* - would you be willing to enter into such a conversation with them?
- *Perhaps you are the one doing things a bit differently than others* - is it worth being divided over, or can you conquer your differences by focusing on what is truly important, and shift to becoming “fellow workers for the Kingdom of God”?

Pray - Take a moment to share your heart with God

Journal - Take a moment to write down what is on your heart right now

NOTES

[illegible]

Devotion - Thursday

Read - Take a moment to listen as God speaks to you

Colossians 4:12-13

¹² Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. ¹³ I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Ponder - Take a moment to open your heart to what God wants to instill in you

- Epaphras surely was a great servant of Christ Jesus! What about Epaphras resonates with you, and why?

Read slowly through these two verses again, and let us see how Paul describes Epaphras - he was a man who:

- Had a servant heart and lifestyle. Like a slave he would give all his time and energy to serve the Lord.
 - Knew how to be a true and faithful prayer warrior for the believers:
 - Praying that his fellow believers would stand firm in the will of God, not shifting an inch from the course that God has set for them.
 - Praying for the spiritual growth and maturity of his fellow believers.
 - Praying for his fellow Christians to become day by day, more and more what God would want their lives to look like.
 - Knew how to serve not only his own community, but also people from other church families in other areas and cities, like Laodicea and Hierapolis.
- If someone would need to share *who you are to a church family, how would you like to be described?*

Pray - Take a moment to share your heart with God

Journal - Take a moment to write down what is on your heart right now

NOTES

[illegible]

Devotion - Friday

Read - Take a moment to listen as God speaks to you

Colossians 4:14-15

¹⁴Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. ¹⁵Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

Ponder - Take a moment to open your heart to what God wants to instill in you

- It is only here in verse 14 that we learn about *Luke's profession*. A traveling doctor, and a great man - *the author of both the Gospel of Luke, and the Acts of the Apostles*, an amazing two-volume work as part of the New Testament. He is mentioned here as a faithful companion and friend of Paul. Imagine living a life together as believers where each of us serve our Father, each in our different roles, each making such an incredible impact for the Lord as these two friends, Paul and Luke. *Do you have such a friend in the Lord, of whom you can say that you're serving God together?* From personal experience I can promise you that it is an amazing blessing in one's life. *If you have someone like that, treasure it. If not, seek out a friend in Christ, journey close together, pray together and celebrate how God is using each of you.*
- We also learn about *Demas*. He too was a fellow worker, named here and in Philemon 24, but then in 2 Timothy 4:9-11 we read, ⁹"Do your best to come to me quickly, ¹⁰*for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me* and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry". We know nothing more about Demas, except that he fell into the temptation to "love the world" more than staying faithful to the ministry he was called to. Whether he showed remorse later, and returned to serving the Lord we do not know for sure. However, let this be a warning: Serving God, even in ministry, does not mean that you should not *be careful of the temptations* the world has to offer. Commit today once again to *stay in the fight, to walk the narrow road, to stand against the temptations* this world brings before us on a daily basis.
- Finally, we have *Nympha* who was willing to open her home as a house church. What a great example of *making our homes available for ministry!* Why don't you bring your home to the Lord today if He would want to use it for a small group, to host a missionary, or to be of service to Him in another capacity? *Many blessings will follow as we make our stuff available to the service of our God.*

Pray - Take a moment to share your heart with God

Journal - Take a moment to write down what is on your heart right now

NOTES

[illegible]

Devotion - Saturday

Read - Take a moment to listen as God speaks to you

Colossians 4:16

After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.

Ponder - Take a moment to open your heart to what God wants to instill in you

Here we see clearly how the *Letters of Paul circulated* between the early church families. Tichicus thus is taking with him Colossians, which was also intended to be read by the church in Laodicea, and of course Onesimus is taking the Philemon Letter with him to be read by his master, Philemon.

However, what Letter should be read by the church in Colossae, coming from Laodicea? Several possibilities are being debated, amongst them that this letter of Paul has been lost, and another that this could actually have been the letter to the Ephesians, that has made its way by now to the church in Laodicea, and should therefore be passed on to Colossae. Some argue that this could also explain the close relationship between several passages in Colossians and Ephesians. Of course all of this is simply very interesting, and would be hard to prove at this point one way or another.

It does help us though to get a picture of how important it was for Paul that the early church would *theologically be on the same page*, be one in heart, mind, soul, and serving God with the same belief system...from the same faith mindset.

This seems to be the same for the Church today: Our Bible should be the Bible, the Word of God, giving one direction, leading us through the Holy Spirit to serve one, true God, staying all on one, true Path!

Is this still how you look at the Bible, as God's Word?

- When you think back on this week: What stood out to you more than anything else?
- When you think ahead to tomorrow: Be in prayer for God's servant to bring God's Message to God's people, and pray that the Holy Spirit will prepare and open your heart to receive this well.

Pray - Take a moment to share your heart with God

Journal - Take a moment to write down what is on your heart right now

NOTES

[illegible]

Sunday Evening Gathering

Message 1: Colossians 4:2-4

Develop camel knees!



My wife took these photos during one of the Bible Tours that we lead to the Holy Land. They say a picture is worth a thousand words. Well, then these two pictures hopefully tells the story well of how our *knees* can very easily testify whether we've spent time on our knees or not! This is of course extremely true of camels. You will have a hard time finding a camel with hair on their knees. Usually their knees will show clearly that these animals kneel literally every time they go down, and even when they get up they need to push against their knees again. Thus, whether they go to rest, or get going, they have to use their knees - *and the condition of their knees is the proof!*

Prayer is extremely important to Paul. We see this basically in all of his letters to the churches. It is therefore no surprise that some of the most amazing recorded prayers of believers that we have are those of Paul. Personally I love the one in Ephesians 3:14-21. If you have some time, take a moment to say this prayerfully with Paul:

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from Whom His whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now to Him Who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, ²¹ to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

It is therefore no surprise to also find an emphasis on prayer right here in Colossians 4:2-4 where Paul says:

² Devote yourselves to *prayer*, being watchful and thankful. ³ And *pray* for us, too, that God may open a door for our Message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. ⁴ *Pray* that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

Paul challenges us that our prayer life shouldn't simply be the result of prayers in church, before (most) meals, and perhaps when we're going through a tough time. So what do we learn about prayer from these three verses? Let us see:

- Verse 2 - Prayer should be something that we *devote* ourselves to. It should be a spiritual *discipline* that we value so highly that we do it daily...regularly...not only when we can fit it in, or when it seems needed.
- Verse 3a - It is important to *not only pray for ourselves*. Paul encourages the believers to *also pray for him*, as they as spiritual leaders do pray for the believers - remember chapter 1 verse 9b, "...since the day we heard about you, *we have not stopped praying for you*..."!
- Verses 3b-4 (part 1) - *What should we pray for when we pray for one another?* Yes, of course for safety, health, healing, and other kinds of care for our bodies like sufficient food and protection against the elements of nature - Paul is in fact in prison, "in chains", remember? However, it is crucial to note that Paul does not really mention *any* of the things that would have to do with his personal/bodily care (safety, food, health). Of course he is not saying that this is not important, and shouldn't be prayed for. However, we need to remember that it is also true that we can enter heaven with physical struggles and brokenness, rather than missing it altogether because our souls were not in order! Thus, praying for each other's spiritual care, nurturing and growth is absolutely worth mentioning, in fact it should probably even have priority. It is almost as if Paul might have realized that it is *easy for people to remember to pray for physical needs, but so often we'll forget the importance of praying for one another's spiritual care too!* May we learn from this request of Paul to have a good balance in our prayer life for physical and spiritual care.
- Verses 3b-4 (part 2) - *What are these spiritual things that we could pray for?* Paul lists a few: *Open doors* so that the Good News can reach others (in fact, that's what he is in prison for!), and the *wisdom* to share this News clearly as the opportunity then arises. It doesn't help that one receive an open door to share the best News ever, and then don't share it in a way that it can be received well. *Both the opportunity to share, and the manner in which the Gospel should be shared are equally important.*

So once again the challenge:

May we devote ourselves to prayer.

May we spend dedicated time in prayer.

May we humble ourselves before our God.

May we kneel before Him.

May we do this so often that our knees can prove that we are people of prayer.

Let us develop...

camel knees.

Discussion 1 - Shifting our prayer life from “regular” to “devoted”

How important is prayer to you? Would you mind sharing what your prayer life looks like?

We are encouraged in this message to shift from praying “regularly” to being “devoted” to prayer - how do you feel about this distinction?

Discussion 2 - Adding “spiritual” content to our prayers

Would you be comfortable sharing some of the contents of your prayers - who do you usually pray for, and for what?

Would you agree that in general our prayers are often more focused on ourselves and our immediate family / friends, and perhaps even a bit more on everyone’s physical needs? This message challenged us to also include others outside of our “inner circles”, and to also start praying for spiritual needs. Who could these “others” be that we could pray for, and what could be examples of “spiritual needs”?

Message 2: Colossians 4:5-6

Seize every moment and every conversation!

⁵ Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Colossians 4:5-6

It is always important how we act and speak; however, when we speak to “outsiders”, non-believers, we need to be even more careful how we handle ourselves. Within our Christian family our brothers and sisters will (should!) show grace when we stumble in actions or speech, and we could even have follow-up conversations as needed when we do stumble. However, we need to remember that it is different with people who haven't found life in Christ yet. They are probably not ready to forgive and show mercy so easily, and we might not encounter them so often...or even ever again!

I believe it can be extremely helpful to embrace the word “outsiders” that Paul is using here to describe non-Christians. This descriptive word, “outsiders” should not be seen in a negative sense. It should not be treated as a way to “look down upon” non-believers, or being judgemental. It certainly is not saying, “Well, look at us Christians - we’re in and you poor souls are out - good luck out there!”. No!

Embracing this Pauline use of “outsiders” should remind us of how *serious* our encounters with non-Christians actually are. It should *stop us*, it should *slow us down*, it should *break our hearts*, it should remind us:

In front of us now stands/sits...

someone who is “not attached to Christ yet” (Christ-ian = attached to Christ)...

someone who is lost, with a grieving Father waiting on him/her to come home...

someone who is stumbling around in darkness, and therefore constantly getting hurt...

someone who has no hope, because our only Hope is in Christ...

someone who is filled with fear, guilt, sin...

In other words, embracing the term “outsider” is supposed to let your “saved soul” reach out to a “lost soul”, who could come home; a soul whom God wishes to include in His family - someone who needs to come...INSIDE...and become an “insider” ...a child of the Father!

So, when we do encounter “outsiders” we need to be extra careful. Paul encourages us through these two verses to:

- “*Be wise...*” (v. 5a) - we need to show in our encounters that we are *different*, that our actions and speech are *driven by another Source*. It will not be helpful if we look just like the world around us. “Outsiders” / Non-believers need to experience that we follow a pattern for life, as setup by our Father in heaven. A pattern that was perfectly modeled to us by our Lord and Savior.
- “*...make the most of every opportunity*” (v. 5c) - we need to *seize the moment*! We do not know when (if ever) we will spend time again with non-believers. We might start a relationship with them, but we also might have just “bumped” into one another for a moment in time. Therefore every moment needs to become an opportunity that should be grasped with both hands, for the Kingdom’s sake! The verb for “*make the most*” literally means in the Greek to “*buy out*” - in other words, give up whatever it takes (resources, time, effort) to get a tight hold on opportunities with non-believers, and then use Holy Spirit inspired wisdom to fill these opportunities with actions and speech that will reflect something of Jesus Christ. The same Jesus Who changed us once, is the Lord Who is now longing to bring life to the non-believers whom we have encountered...whether ever so briefly, or for a while!
- “*Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt...*” (v. 6a) - Christians need to work at letting their testimonies be “tasteful”, lively, interesting...a “*colorful*” *dialogue*. It should definitely not just be a boring, tedious monologue presented like a prepared speech from memory. It should absolutely also not be judgemental, leaving non-believers with a feeling of condemnation, and no hope! No, our conversations with “outsiders” should be full of grace. Our *input* should bring “*taste*” to every encounter, as if we’ve added salt to a meal.

It seems that “*conversation*” is the key word here. Often the word “*testimony*” can be understood as us simply sharing that “all should believe in God, why they should believe in God, and that people should give their lives to Christ”, and then we close with leading people in a salvation prayer. However, this is often not how it goes. A “*testimony*” is *actually more of a “conversation”*. It is a *dialogue*, rather than a monologue, where we strive to hear people’s hearts, and then have the privilege to share, with great sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit, how we have found God at work in our lives.

- Finally, the prayer is that our conversations will leave people with a feeling that these encounters were so meaningful that they want to build on it with some questions! This will then give us the opportunity to lean even more into the Spirit for guidance, so that we “*...may know how to answer everyone*” (v. 6b). Answers that can draw people closer to God...so they may even ask us about finding salvation in Christ. The hope is that at this point we may have the amazing privilege to lead people in a prayer of salvation to find life in Christ...and become *INsiders*!

Discussion 1 - Embracing the term “outsiders”

We’ve shared in this message how helpful it can be to embrace the word “outsiders” that Paul is using here to describe non-Christians.

What stirs in your heart when you think of a non-believer as an “outsider” ...

...who is “not attached to Christ yet” (*Christ-ian = someone attached to Christ*),
...who is lost, with a grieving Father waiting on him/her to come home,
...who is stumbling around in darkness, and therefore constantly getting hurt,
...who has no hope, because our only Hope is in Christ,
...who is filled with fear, guilt, sin?

How does embracing the term “outsiders” shift the way that you think about possible future encounters with non-believers?

Discussion 2 - Tasty conversations leading to meaningful questions

We have shared several ideas of what conversations with *outsiders* could look like. We emphasized that it would be better to share our faith through a “dialogue”, rather than a “monologue” style (which often is no more than a list of faith statements). Paul encourages us to aim for conversations that are “...always full of grace, seasoned with salt”. Ultimately it would be amazing if such “tasteful” conversations could lead to meaningful questions, that we can then answer with Godly wisdom.

Is this style of filling encounters with “outsiders” acceptable to you? What is your opinion on conversations with non-believers?

Message 3: Colossians 4:17-18

Complete the work you have received from the Lord!

Paul ends Colossians with these final words in verses 17-18 of chapter 4, “¹⁷ Tell Archippus: ‘See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord.’ ¹⁸ I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you”.

It would be really difficult to connect the “work” that Archippus needs to complete to something specific. All attempts to do this would honestly not amount to much more than educated guesses. It seems to be better to simply keep the broader context of Colossians in mind, which is to *lead this church family to spiritual maturity*. And then also remember that Paul viewed Archippus as someone who could really put effort into his ministry role - in Philemon 2b Paul describes Archippus as a “fellow soldier”. In other words, Paul sees Archippus as someone who understands that this is a spiritual war, and that you need to *fight in ministry as if you are a soldier for the Lord!* To say it differently: Paul wants Archippus to be told that he should continue the good fight, as a faithful soldier would do, to lead the Colossae believers to victory, which would be spiritual maturity. *This would be how he could complete the work he has received from the Lord!*

In the same manner as we would sign our letters today, *Paul also enjoyed signing his letters*. Some even wonder if he might have struggled with his eye sight as he writes the ending of some letters as in Galatians, using larger letters, “See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand” (Galatians 6:11). Paul mostly dictated his letters to a secretary, but then ended it with his own handwriting to *authenticate* the letter, and to also add a touch of *affection*.

Thus, in his own handwriting Paul is making two final appeals to the Colossae church: “Remember my chains” and “Grace be with you”.

- The first is an encouragement that the believers would not forget about him in prison. They should pray so that *he can continue to have enough strength to proclaim the Good News fearlessly*, as he has always done (even to the point of now being a prisoner for Christ) - see also Ephesians 6:19-20, “¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the Gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should”. Surely Paul is also hoping that remembering his chains would *challenge the Colossae church to fearlessly keep witnessing* to the Truth at every opportunity they might receive.
- The second appeal from Paul, “Grace be with you”, is huge. This is far more than a typical letter ending like “Kind regards”, “Blessings”, “See you soon”, or something similar. This is

a cry to God, the Source and Dispenser of Grace to *give to the Colossae church family more than they ever may deserve to receive...to have the...* GRACE OF GOD REST UPON THEM.

What an incredibly special way of ending an incredibly special letter to a church family?!

Discussion 1 - Complete the work you have received from the Lord

We read that Paul encourages Archippus to complete the work he has received from the Lord. We shared that this could have referred to many different things, but probably included leading others in their spiritual growth.

It would be a mistake to assume that only pastors, missionaries and other church or ministry workers have received something from the Lord to do. We are the “Body” of the Lord, remember? So this would mean that *every part* of it has a function. Is it not exciting to realize that each of us have some role to play as we serve our Lord together?

Is there something you are doing now, or have thought about doing in service to our Lord? (Remember, there is no right or wrong answer, and nothing too small is worth mentioning - if something is from the Lord it is *always BIG* no matter how “small” the world may perceive it to be!).

Discussion 2 - Grace be with you!

Remember, everything in the Bible is ALSO meant DIRECTLY FOR YOU. This is the divine nature of God's Word - it can have a meaning for the first "audience", in this case the Colossae church, but then through the ages also to each and every other believer - including up to this very day - you!

Have you ever looked at Scripture like this? Perhaps you can even add your own name into this text below, to make it more "real" that *this is truly also meant for you!*

In other words, we would close this study on Colossians with this truth: YOU can hear this blessing AS COMING DIRECTLY TO YOU: "Grace be with you"!

Now...what does the last paragraph of tonight's message mean to you, when you hear this as if meant for YOU? *[Feel free to add your own name into the blank spaces].*

"Grace be with you [_____]"

This is a cry to God, the Source and Dispenser of Grace to

give you [_____]

more than you [_____] ever may deserve to receive

to have the

GRACE OF GOD REST UPON YOU [_____].

Conclusion

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

To say that I enjoy reading God's Word is a huge understatement.

The older I get the more I want to read God's Word.

The slower I get the slower I want to read God's Word.

The jewels are in the detail.

God's Word should be on our minds.

God's Word should be in our hearts.

God's Word should leak from our lives.

It was a feast diving deep into Colossians.

It was a feast seeing Jesus through Colossians.

I pray it was a feast for you too.

It is a feast walking with my Jesus.

I pray it is a feast for you too.

Jesus left heaven to come and walk with us.

Let us walk with our Jesus into heaven.

A huge praise to my Lord
Without Him I would have nothing to write about

A huge thank you to my mentor
Professor Dr. Jan van der Watt

A huge thank you to my family
My wife is always without fail such an encouragement
My kids are always such a joy

A huge thank you to my family in Christ
Dayspring Wesleyan Church Family has been instrumental in this book

Dedicated to my Lord
Dedicated to my wife