

# COLOSSIANS

## A JOURNEY "IN, THROUGH AND FOR CHRIST"

### Colossians Chapter 1 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

<sup>2</sup> To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

### Thanksgiving and Prayer

<sup>3</sup> We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, <sup>4</sup> because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people—<sup>5</sup> the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel <sup>6</sup> that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. <sup>7</sup> You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, <sup>8</sup> and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

<sup>9</sup> For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, <sup>10</sup> so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, <sup>11</sup> being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, <sup>12</sup> and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. <sup>13</sup> For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

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## **IN-CHRIST – Staying Connected to Know, Grow and Go as Disciples In Christ**

Having returned from our short-term mission trip to Mexico, Joe Hill and I are excited to begin this 5-week series to explore the Book of Colossians with you. We know that as believers and followers, we have everything we need to guide our daily lives IN CHRIST and THROUGH CHRIST alone. As the two free-spirited staff members here at St. Timothy's, Joe and I know that Pastor Dan might need a seat belt for the next few weeks, as the ride we are about to take through Colossians might feel a bit like the bumpy back roads of Tijuana. As you picture Dan riding in the passenger's seat holding onto the Jesus bar in the pick-up truck where he has no control over the steering wheel, the gas pedal, or the destination where the journey might lead us. However, take comfort Pastor Dan, we promise to guide each of our back seat passengers along for the ride over the potholes we sometimes find in trying to live out our Christian faith in the everyday world.

As you will see, Paul provides insights and instruction throughout this book of the Bible on what it takes to live out our faith anchored in Christ. In this journey, He shows us that we cannot cling to our own ideas and blend them into our own version of what we believe Christianity to be. We must look solely to Christ as our hope and true source of wisdom. Our connection to Christ as our Lord and Savior is what provides us with the guidance to move from salvation through sanctification. Sanctification is simply a lifelong process whereby we grow spiritually to become more like Christ or in God's eyes "holy". During this process, we move gradually from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity.

During our time in Mexico, we heard from some of our student leaders throughout the week – Chad Mays, Jessica Donaldson, Dylan Wagner, Zoe Stamos, and Justin Collier. Each of these students shared spiritual wisdom from God's Word and personal testimonies highlighting the anchor IN CHRIST that gives them strength to confront the daily battles life has thrown their way. Each of these evening devotions impressed upon me how these students knew that IN CHRIST they could accomplish whatever goal God called them to achieve or whatever struggle He led them to overcome.

These students spoke of the power gained from faith, love, hope and gratitude in what Christ had done for them. They understood that only by their connection with Christ, through faith in Him and through fellowship with Him, can we truly move ahead in this life to experience Kingdom life here on earth and for eternity. Through each of their stories, we gained fresh perspective and a renewed appreciation of Jesus Christ. We saw the fullness of God in how He affected each of their lives and served as the sole source for them living out the Christian life.

You see the Book of Colossians is a book about Connection. It is only in our connection to Christ powered by the Holy Spirit that we find the spiritual wisdom to serve the purpose God has for each of us. I look at it much like the mobile phones we carry around with us each day. You see the phone has a purpose – its purpose is to allow us to communicate to one another through various means (text, voice, multi-media) over vast distances to share information, rejoice together, or grow in our relationship with each other – in other words to stay connected.

But let's pause and reflect on this for a moment. If you leave your cell phone sitting on the table and never connect it to a power source, then what happens? The phone is useless – it cannot do what its Creator designed it to do. You see inside each phone, we have a battery that serves as the source of

power as long as it is recharged and then able to allow all the other components to serve their purpose. Without the battery, without the power source, the phone serves no purpose. But we'll come back to this later...

**CONNECT IN CHRIST – KNOWING HIM** - The key understanding we gain from Paul's letter, simply stated is:

It is not what we know, but **WHOM** we know that gives us our salvation and sanctification. Knowing Christ is Knowing God. Growing in Christ is Growing in the Father's Word. Going with Christ is going in the power of the Holy Spirit. Let me repeat... It is not what we know, but **WHOM** we know that gives us our salvation and sanctification. Knowing Christ is Knowing God. Growing in Christ is Growing in the Father's Word. Going with Christ is going in the power of the Holy Spirit to influence the lives of others.

At the end of this message, I am going to share with you some key benefits that God gives us all as believers **IN CHRIST**. I might even surprise you a bit with some of the key ways in which our connection **TO CHRIST** gives us our strength **IN CHRIST** and ultimately our purpose in life.

**CATALYST TO ACTION** - Let's learn together from Paul in this opening Chapter, the power of thanksgiving, prayer, and fellowship to create the connection **IN CHRIST** that will empower us **THROUGH CHRIST** to accomplish God's desire **FOR CHRIST** at the hub of our lives!!

### **FOCUS AND IMPACT OF PAUL'S MESSAGE**

Paul prays specifically for the Colossian followers of Christ - for their faith, their hope, their love and their impact on the lives of others. He shows us the power of the Trinity – God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit – to serve as the power source for our prayer lives to affect the transformation that leads us into deeper relationship with Him and into deeper relationships with others. The single most important take away for each of us today is that **IN CHRIST, THROUGH CHRIST, AND FOR CHRIST** we have our calling and purpose in life.

How God chooses us to live out that purpose in each of us is very different and especially unique in how He gifted us. I would like to use the Mexico mission trip to help shed light on how this might look. In doing so, I know many of you may never have been to Mexico. However, you might have had similar experiences if you have been a part of Mercy Mobile, Habitat for Humanity, serving the homeless or other similar missional outreach opportunities to address the needs of others. If you have never been on the mission trip, then maybe the Lord will use this time of sharing to inspire you to consider joining the team next year or supporting others who will go through prayer and financial support.

On our work teams in Mexico, we each brought unique skills, talents and gifts to the worksite. Our task was to build a home for a family on a foundation of concrete that others laid before us. We were to construct a new home from the lumber and nails provided through the funding and support from our church family. Even having all the supplies for building the home, we knew the true key to building the home would be a unity of Spirit among our team members. A unity of purpose to allow each of us to contribute our unique gifts to the completion of the home.

<sup>3</sup> *We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, <sup>4</sup> because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people— (Colossians 1:3-4)*

We began each day with a devotional time together by sharing in the reading of God's Word and reflecting on how our Lord's teachings would help bring a unity of Spirit and guide our efforts throughout the day in front of us. God's presence gave us the insight to know that sharing the love of Christ with the families for whom we were building was the MAIN goal. By doing crafts with the children, inviting the family members to hammer the nails or paint the home alongside us, we let them feel a true part of the home God was providing. We let them see the Spirit of Christ and our love for them shine through our efforts to serve them. We prayed over the worksite, our team and the families each day as Paul did "for the love of the Spirit to guide our hearts and minds so that we could be the heads, hearts, and hands of Jesus.

<sup>5</sup> *the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel<sup>6</sup> that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. (Colossians 1:5-6)*

In the evening we shared devotional time in corporate worship, each night one of our adult leaders would team up with one of our high school or college student leaders to explore a key passage relating to how we could be the heads, hearts, and hands of Christ. The leaders would also share personal experiences, insights and ideas for application while serving on the mission field or for when we returned back home. Each night it became clear that God intended for the adult leaders simply to provide a foundation on which the students could tap into the heads and hearts of their peers by sharing how God was at work in their own lives.

Both Chad Mays and Jessica Donaldson – shared some difficult times in life that Christ through the Holy Spirit helped them overcome. Paul speaks of our faith being IN CHRIST. Always in Scripture, Christ is the object of our faith. In our spiritual journey, faith in and of itself is not sufficient. Faith centered on Christ alone is what makes our faith reliable. Why? Because Christ can never fail. Our trust in Him is what gives our faith its power to overcome any battle. We see in these passages faith, love, and hope. Our faith rests in the work Christ has done for us; our love works through Christ in the present; and our hope rests in the promises Christ has given us to press forward into the future He has in store for us.

*We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, <sup>10</sup> so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, <sup>11</sup> being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience,... (Colossians 1:10-11)*

Dylan Wagner reminded us to make sure that God is at the center of our faith and our deeds as we served others in our daily lives – whether in Mexico, at home, at school, or in the workplace. He shared James 2:14-18:

<sup>14</sup> *What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? <sup>15</sup> Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup> If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? <sup>17</sup> In*

*the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. <sup>18</sup> But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.*

Zoe Stamos shared how we must show the characteristics of God's heart in how we engage in daily pursuit to live a life worthy and please Him out of sheer love God has showed us. She explored the story of the prodigal son and his father along with the criminal on the cross with Jesus. In both cases, God reaches out to embrace us when we return to Him with hearts of repentance and seeking forgiveness.

Throughout the week, each student turned to a quote from Mother Theresa to guide our heads and hearts into the night's lesson:

*"Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours." (Mother Theresa)*

As we think about these words, let us return to our mobile phone example at the beginning of the message, we were looking at the phone, the battery, the charging cord and the power source as key components to having the phone live out its purpose as designed by its creator. If we put ourselves in the place of the phone, we too have the components within us that require a connectedness to live out our purpose in life. When we put our faith in Christ, God gave us the Holy Spirit to serve as our battery from within to allow every other component to align to God's will for our lives and to live out our purpose for Him.

However, for this battery to be fully charged, we need to stay connected to Christ. We stay connected by taking the power cord – containing intertwined wires for prayer, meditation, fellowship and worship – and connecting them to God through Christ, as the central power source in our lives. As long as we stay plugged in, we remain fully charged to serve the purpose God has for us. We become His communication vessel for sharing the Gospel message, for bringing His Word to others, and for transforming the lives of others through our ability to communicate and share His truth.

Paul desires for us to know the power of the risen Christ. We should look to Christ's power as boundless and we should expect that power to be an unending power source in our own lives – gaining our strength according to His limitless supply. As long as we stay connected, we do receive Christ's power not according to our need; rather we receive His power in order to meet His purpose.

In our closing session in Mexico, Justin Collier pointed us to Romans 12:1-2:

*<sup>1</sup>Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

But how do we do become living sacrifices as mom's and dad's caring for our kids, as co-workers or neighbors helping those alongside us facing life's battles? Justin spoke to us about getting spiritually fit and comparing to how an athlete becomes physically fit.

He charges us to get a coach, trainer and workout partner in our lives for spiritual growth. A coach to give us the vision of what it means to be a living sacrifice, a trainer to push us beyond what we believe are our limits when we seek to spend time meditating on God's Word and praying for one another. Finally, a workout partner to hold us accountable to applying God's Word to our lives becoming holy and pleasing to God.

So I challenge you: Do you have a coach, a trainer, a workout partner for your spiritual growth? True disciples seek these out to strengthen their faith, renew their minds, and transform their lives to sacrifice as God calls them to do – loving and serving others before themselves.

The closing verses of this Colossians passage (v.12-14) read:

*<sup>12</sup> and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you<sup>[1]</sup> to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. <sup>13</sup> For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

We see in these passages the key blessings and benefits God gives us when we live out our faith IN CHRIST, THROUGH CHRIST, AND FOR CHRIST:

- Qualified to share in His inheritance
- Rescued from Satan and the darkness of his rule over our lives
- Granted immediate access to God's eternal kingdom
- Restored in our relationship to God
- Forgiven of all our sins – past, present and future

Through the spiritual wisdom and understanding IN CHRIST, we are able to gain full insight to our purpose and live out that purpose FOR CHRIST in our daily lives. So let us live a life worthy of the Lord, let's please Him in every way, let's bear fruit in all our good works, let's grow in our knowledge of Him. By responding in faith, love and gratitude, we will be strong, not through our own strength, but THROUGH CHRIST and given all the power and might God will give us to endure life's battles and show patience in the journey that lies ahead. Let us pray.