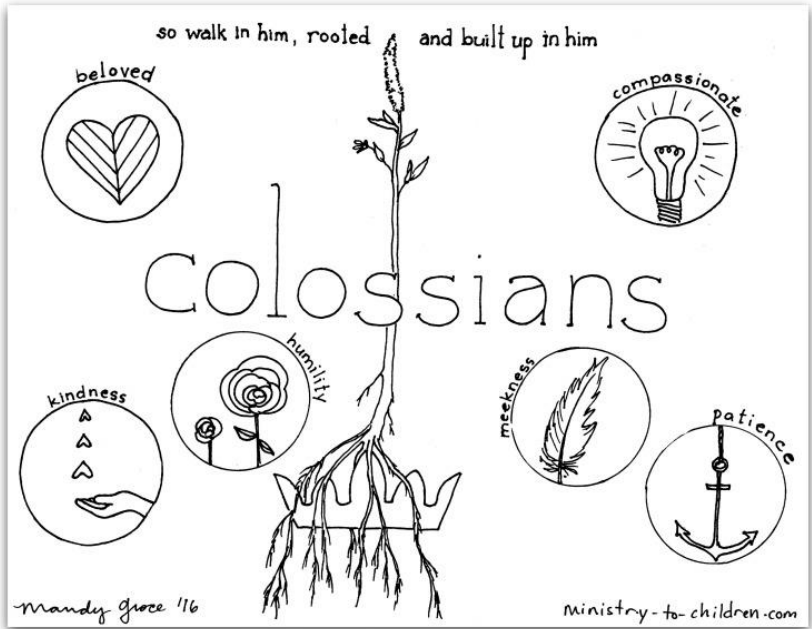


Devotional Series on Colossians



Notes: Primary resources used:

1. Carson, H M *Colossians and Philemon* - Tyndale New Testament Commentary
2. Curtis Vaughan in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*

Scripture quotations are from the ESV

Day 1: A is for Apostle (B is for Baptist) (🕊️)

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother...Col 1:1

In today's age, if a person self-identifies as an apostle, then that is my cue to ignore them completely.

Why? Simply because I choose to stick to identifying as an apostle those whom Jesus identified as apostles in Scripture. These original apostles were not only foundational messengers in establishing and extending the church, but they were also clearly empowered with a power and authority not witnessed today, to the extent that we understand their writings to be Scripture itself. I do think that there are some (very few) within the church that have an apostolic gifting in the sense of pioneering and being able to give clear authoritative guidance (I'm thinking of house church leaders in China that the Lord has taken through deep waters and used them to disciple many believers), but they certainly wouldn't want to be identified as an apostle! I think it would be more accurate to describe such folk as disciples anointed with the gift of leadership.

Paul was clearly called by God to be an apostle, and in writing this letter, he understands this and knows that what is written is to be treated as God speaking Himself. Paul is simply the instrument serving the body of Christ (not self-serving – which is another clue!).

Paul was not called to be an apostle because of who he was, but because of God's grace and mercy. That is his qualification.

And the words have been written down for our benefit, so that we too can listen, learn and live accordingly.

Day 2: Calling all Saints!

To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae

Col 1:2a

I notice that Paul never addressed his letters to “the sinners saved by grace.” That’s what I was taught to say and believe about myself. It just sounds so humble.

But sinners are enemies of God and don’t get into heaven. If I was to say “I was a sinner but am now saved by grace” that would be more accurate, but to continue to call myself a sinner after giving my life to Christ would be an insult to Calvary. Yes, I do still sin, but I’ve undergone a fundamental change in identity: I am no longer a sinner saved by grace, but a saint made by grace.

I’m not a sinner that sometimes gets things right (an impossibility), but a saint that does have a knack for getting it wrong – and I will gladly admit to being a sinful saint (which is more accurate than trying to convince myself I am a saintly sinner which amounts to salvation by works). And this makes grace and mercy so incredible: why on earth would Jesus want to present me faultless?

Christ changed my identity, my status, and I pray that I will be found faithful to the high calling.

Day 3: In Christ alone

***To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae...
Col 1:2a***

We're staying on this verse because there are two words which come up repeatedly in Paul's letters (over 160 times in various forms): *in Christ*.

It highlights the truth that Christ transforms us from sinner to saint. We have a new position – elevated from the pit of death to being in Christ. We are connected to Him!

And here comes the flip side of what was shared yesterday: as we grow closer to Christ, we do become more and more aware of our sinfulness (and that is why many would say they are sinners saved by grace – but praise God we are redeemed sinners...called saints!). Dare I say that the mark of a true saint is awareness of sin? This is only natural, since light and purity has a way of contrasting that which isn't! If you want true self-awareness, be Christ-aware. And then concomitant with this is the growing realisation that there is only one reason we are saved: because God worked in us first.

God loved us first – and for me that is an incomprehensible truth for which I am profoundly grateful.

Day 4: Paul Preached Prosperity!

Grace to you and peace from God our Father – Col 1:2b

Grace...from the Greek word *charis*...from the Hebrew word *chēn* which is what one experiences when one enjoys the blessing of being favoured by a superior – in this case God.

Peace...from the Greek word *eirēnē*...from the Hebrew word *shalom*, which speaks of far more than simply the absence of war and conflict, but the healthy condition of the life of a person who enjoys God's favour.

Of course, these conditions can only be known if we can call God Father, and we can only do that because of what Christ has done on Calvary.

So it turns out that Paul preached a prosperity gospel...but not the one that gets bandied around today, but rather a spiritual prosperity.

Because is there anything richer than being in Christ? Is there anything richer than being at peace with God? Is there anything richer than knowing God's presence in our lives? Is there anything richer than having the love of God towards us?

I mean, its not like we're deserving of any of this...

Day 5: Thank God!

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints...Col 1:3&4

It must have encouraged these Christians to hear this encouragement from Paul, especially since they were not exactly in a famous city as such, and Paul had not actually met them yet.

Nonetheless, Paul had received news that here was a fellowship of believers who loved God and loved His people, and it warmed Paul's heart.

And it is wonderful when believers are focussed on Jesus and we see love and faith manifested in their lives, because then we know that it is God who is at work.

And so Paul begins by sharing how thankful he is to God. Prayers rooted in humble thanksgiving are a blessing to God.

It's important to understand that while we can tend to the garden of our hearts, we can never take credit for our spiritual growth or for God using us, as if we had hit on some special formula to explain God working in us and through us. God will not give or share His glory with another.

But we can give thanks that God would grant us the privilege of being used by Him, and that He loves us enough to bring us to faith in Him. Isn't that simply amazing?

Day 6: Praise God for you!

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you...Col 1:3

I am touched by that last phrase “when we pray for you...” Paul had not met the Colossian Church, and yet he prayed for them.

I don’t know about you, but it always touches my heart when someone tells me that they prayed for me, and I’ve yet to encounter a person who was disappointed because I prayed for them!

This is one of the beautiful things about being part of the body of Christ. I can pray for brothers and sisters I have never met, and I can pray for unsaved people I have never met. I may never meet them, but since I have heard of them, I can lift them up to the throne of grace.

For example, let me give you some names: Mike and Helen, Keith and Erica, Gustav and Hanlie, Andrew and Anel, Paul and Toni, Cherolyn, Donnely, Eric and Surita, Lebo, Curt, Rod, Dean, Ken, John, Ivan, Gerhard, Graeme and Hazel, Johnny, Rika, Daniel, Bassem and Jeanise...

Folks, I could go on and on – and I know you have names too! All of the above names mentioned have a common denominator of serving in a ministry capacity, and would welcome your prayers – and yes, you can give thanks to God for them. Why don’t you do so now?

Day 7: Hope of Heaven

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel...Colossians 1:3-5

What fed the faith and hope in Christ Jesus that these Colossians had? We are told: the hope laid up in heaven.

A real, objective hope – not an internal mustered up optimism, but real hope based on the wonderful trustworthy promises of God. A real hope based on a real resurrection of a real God-man Jesus Christ. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then we are, as Paul pointed out in 1 Cor 15:12ff, we are to be pitied. Actually, this is what he said: If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

Has anyone ever heard the gospel being promoted in terms of earthly benefits? It's such a limited gospel, and I fear that many do not really appreciate the hope they have simply because they have so much of this earth (or is that the earth has so much of them?).

May we develop eyes for the unseen, and celebrate the real hope that for God's children there will be a real resurrection to real eternal life which shall be filled with love, joy and peace (but not faith...). All the evidence is pointing to that...

Day 8: A Substitute Gospel is Bad News

...because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of truth, the gospel, which has come to you...Colossians 1:5&6a

The only reason a child of God can have hope is because the gospel has been heard and believed. As Romans 10:17 puts it "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." Our faith and subsequent hope is not birthed in an imaginative fantasy, but by believing revealed truth: God, through Jesus, came into this world to save sinners!

And it is Christ, and Christ alone, who saves. The formula is not Jesus + works = salvation, but rather Jesus alone is the source of our salvation. Our contribution is repentant belief so that we can have the privilege of calling Christ our brother.

And we need to hold onto this gospel, because substitutions are easily available.

But why substitute Jesus? After all, He became ours!

Day 9: Gospel Grip

Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing – as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth... Colossians 1:5b&6

If you have heard the gospel, then you have encountered God Himself.

The gospel is not a man-made entity, it is good news from God Himself, and He takes the initiative to get it to you. People are simply the agents, but God is the source. The gospel is to be spread throughout the world, but at the same time it is an individual encounter.

And when the gospel gets into you, when you ponder it and go beyond a superficial mental understanding (made possible by the Holy Spirit's enabling), then fruit will grow within you. Truth becomes lived experience.

The grace of God in truth encountering you and me – how amazing is that?

Have you grasped the gospel? Has the gospel grasped you?

Day 10: Best foot forward?

...just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. Col 1:7&8

I don't know what his feet looked like up close, but I presume Epaphras had all ten toes. Whatever they looked like, the Scriptures testify that those who bring good news have beautiful feet (Isaiah 52:7)!

The Colossian Christians became Christian because Epaphras took the trouble to walk there and share the gospel, and today we are reading a letter addressed to them because of his obedience! And what is more, the gospel was bearing fruit in their lives as they reflected the love of Christ through their lives.

Evangelism does not happen by accident. It requires intentionality and follow through. Not everyone will respond, but some will.

So take heart, even if your toes are ugly – you can still have beautiful feet. The lesson is not what they look like, but what you do with them!

You don't have to go to the other side of the world – just start by crossing the room (which, if memory serves me correct, is actually a book title by Bill Hybels).

Who do you need to walk and talk to?

Day 11: Knowing God

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. Colossians 1:9&10

What a beautiful prayer – please pray it for me!

I am sure this represents the desire of every true believer: to be filled with the knowledge of God's will, having wisdom and understanding. The goal of this is not to be clever, but to walk in a way that honours God: to be fully pleasing!

The knowledge God desires us to have is not about Him, but Him. Remember, just because a person has a few letters behind their name (yes, even in theology), does not mean they know God. You can pontificate reformational (that's kind of an oxymoron) truths as eloquently as you like, but if you don't know God, it's wasted. I don't think I am far off the mark to say that knowing about God can lead to pride and arrogance, but knowing God will lead you in the opposite direction: towards humility and love.

The knowledge God requires is that we know Him and His will. This can only come to us through the enlightening assistance of the Holy Spirit, and only if we walk in that will can we expect to bear fruit and grow even deeper in our knowledge of God.

And knowing the will of God is not rocket science: it is written for us in His Word.

So...my prayer is that YOU will be filled with the knowledge of God and His will, so that you can walk in His ways and be fully pleasing to Him!

Day 12: Power to Persevere

May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy...Col 1:11

Paul sure has a way of punching volumes of depth into a few words!

We saw yesterday that a God-centred life will result in knowing Him and producing fruit.

What we will also know is His power enabling us to continue to walk in His ways. The power of God is not a once-off initial supply which must last us (like a battery), but rather a continuous supply (so stay plugged in!). The source of power is God Himself, and so it is God who supplies us with the strength needed to do His will, no matter how tough it gets.

And it does get tough, which is why very specific fruits are enabled in our lives: endurance, patience and joy. If we do not have God's power to do His will, then we will succumb to the circumstances and sink into the quicksand of despairing resignation. Endurance is needed to doggedly press on, patience is needed so as to not retaliate when provoked, and joy comes with knowing that Christ Himself is with us and we share in His sufferings when we suffer (we are not Stoics!).

Spiritual victory is not power for prosperity, but power for perseverance. As Charles Spurgeon once said: through perseverance the snail got on the ark!

Day 13: Transformational Truth

...giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light...Colossians 1:12

It is always a good idea to approach God with an attitude of thanksgiving.

I confess that I often have a knack for approaching as a toddler, in that I protest and demand (I think its in my blood being a South African!).

I marvel at the grace of God that listens to the rants of His children, and then further marvel at His mercy in how He lovingly convicts and re-orientates our thinking.

God is a Father! Before, He was my Judge, but now The Judge is my Dad, and it is He who qualified me to share in the inheritance of the saints (there's that word again). If God qualifies me, who can disqualify me?

If God is for me, who can be against me (Romans 8:31)?

It's easy to take our 'saint-ship' for granted and relegate the truth to a conceptual level – but we would be all the poorer for doing so.

Instead, let us allow the truth to sink into our hearts, because then the truth shall transform us and set us free.

Day 14: Energise...

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Col 1:13&14

Remember the old Star Trek TV series (revealing my age here!)? I was always fascinated by the transporter – where they would stand on a spot, say the word ‘energise,’ then dematerialise and rematerialize in their new location!

Permit me to use it as an analogy for this beautiful gospel summary. When we give our lives to Christ, we truly have been transferred to a new kingdom! In the old kingdom, we were under the domain and authority of darkness (sinners under sin), and in the new kingdom we are in Christ (saints made by grace).

Of course, we’re still here on earth, and so it is so easy to lose the impact of what has taken place when we enter into this new kingdom. We still look the same and have to face the same issues, and indeed new difficulties often arise as a result of our commitment to Christ.

But a tremendous difference has taken place: there is now a beautiful word, my favourite word of all time, written over my heart: forgiven. Jesus made it possible. God forgave me.

And so I don’t want anything to do with that old life. I want to walk in the newness of life that Jesus made possible. I want to honour Him. I don’t always get it right, but praise God I am forgiven! I have hope. My destiny is secure.

Now if I can just convince others to join and be forgiven too!

Day 15: Brother Jesus

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. Col 1:15

And so begins one of the most beautiful descriptions of the person of Christ, which should leave us in no doubt as to who He is!

Following on from v14, where we see Jesus as being the One responsible for providing redemption, we now get a glimpse of His glory in terms of His true nature.

We see that Jesus is God revealed or God made visible (see Hebrews 1:3), and that He is firstborn of all creation. This does not mean that Jesus was created, but refers to His status as a firstborn son would be in a family (see Hebrews 1:2).

Which means that one day we shall be able to hug God.

It also means that we need to ardently reject any other sources (other than Scripture!) that proclaim itself as being the means to know God. It is Jesus, and Jesus alone, who makes the Father known and who is the way to the Father.

But how's this for an incredibly beautiful truth: we get to call Jesus our brother, because we're family!

And even though He has reason to be, He actually isn't embarrassed to call us brother and sister either!

Day 16: You are the creation of Christ

For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. Col 1:16

I have a suspicion the Lord enjoyed creating. Creating is hard work, a combination of, as the saying goes, inspiration and perspiration. Few joys match the experience of seeing a creative task complete.

And I can just imagine the utter delight and joy our Trinity God had in creating – it must have been fun!

And in this verse, we are told that everything, and absolutely everything, was created through Christ and for Christ.

We like to think it was all created for our benefit, but we are simply the beneficiaries who get to enjoy and steward creation. There are parts of creation that we will never get to see for ourselves, and so we come to understand that it wasn't created for our glory, but His.

And since Christ is over all, it really does not make sense to worship lesser beings, such as angels.

But how privileged we are to be able to know our Creator personally: its not what you know but Who you know!

Just in case you were not aware, your purpose has just been revealed: you were created for God's glory!

Day 17: Everything Matters

And he is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. Col 1:18

Science is searching for the theory of everything. It's been a philosophical quest for a long time too: the Greeks pondered the rationality behind the universe and gave this rational force a name: *logos*.

It turns out it isn't a theory or a force, but a person. This is one of the reasons the opening of John's gospel is so radical: it identifies the *logos*, the Word, as an eternal person: Jesus!

And the reason the world, and you and I, are held together is because of Jesus.

Which hopefully makes you realise that Jesus really is simply beyond comprehension in terms of his glorious power. This makes His descent into humanity all the more remarkable (see Phil 2:5-11), and the angels must have been dumbfounded!

Our world matters to God; you matter to God.

It's just tragic that God doesn't seem to matter to many people anymore.

But you and I can change that – we can be, and indeed are called to be, His witnesses. May God help us to make Him matter to those around us!

Day 18: Head vs Body?

And he is the head of the body, the church. Col 1:18

Our human body, in the words of David, is truly ‘fearfully and wonderfully made’ (Psalm 139). Tragically, it often takes a breakdown in the system for us to be aware of just how intricately we are made. A stroke, mental illness, multiple sclerosis – we can come up with many examples. It’s awful to witness the results of the communication breakdown that can take place between the brain and the rest of the body.

I know one can run the risk of stretching an analogy too far, but I don’t think so on this one: when the body of Christ fails to truly listen to the Head, disaster happens. Whilst leadership is absolutely pivotal to a culture of a church, what is truly needed to advance the kingdom of God in unity is not a ‘reorganisation of the members, but...renewed obedience to the divine Head (Carson p44).’

If you are not already familiar with it, take a look at how Paul elaborates on this image in 1 Corinthians 12:12 onwards, and then see what the most excellent way is which brings it all together in 1 Cor 13.

The body of Christ, in following its Head, will be the most beautiful place to be in, characterised by love: not wishy-washy sentimentalism, but founded upon the pillars of grace and truth combined (see John 1:14).

If the two are not combined, then there is a problem.

Day 19: All of Christ

He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent. Col 1:18b

Jesus is far more than just a mere mortal and great teacher: His resurrection is proof of that.

The phrase describing Jesus as the beginning clearly has overtones of Genesis 1 as well as John 1, but Jesus is also the beginning in the sense of the Church, His body. It is Jesus who through His resurrection has inaugurated a new age and a new humanity.

This was the longing of the Old Testament prophets: to see the dawn of this new age under the reign of Messiah.

And in a sense it is still the longing of children of God, to be in an era where Christ is King and there is no more pain or sorrow.

We must not forget however that Christ is indeed King, and we are in fact in a new era: the rule of God is to be established not geographically or politically (that will one day come, and we should strive to have godly values in place at government level, since righteousness does exalt a nation – Prov 14:34) but in the hearts of men and women.

Jesus was the first to be raised incorruptible. Our turn is coming too.

The reason for all this? That Christ might be supreme or preeminent in *everything*.

All of Christ for All of Life!

Day 20: Worship inducing mystery

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell...

Col 1:19

If you haven't gathered it by now, after the previous descriptions given, Christ is indeed unique: Fully Man; Fully God.

The unfortunate side effect of that description is that it runs the danger of splitting Jesus into two, as if there were some dividing line between His humanness and His "God-ness" (i.e. His deity). It's a theological debate which goes back to the early church (in 451 the Chalcedon creed was formulated over the issue of the person of Jesus).

It's a worship inducing mystery, and the word we use to describe it is this: Incarnation – the union of two natures into one – God the Son became man and dwelt among us.

I am so out of my depth here seeking to comprehend this mystery, and even more so when I consider why He did so and what it would mean for Him.

The purpose of the Incarnation was Calvary. The purpose of Calvary? Go look in the mirror...and understand that this was to God's glory!

Day 21: The Cost of Reconciliation

...and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. Col 1:20

And so Jesus took on human form so that He could experience Calvary. I can think of more pleasant reasons to take on human form!

But that is Jesus for you: absolutely passionate about the glory of God His Father and being the instrument of reconciliation between us and the Father, to the extent that He wants to call us family! And how incredible is it that it pleased the Father to be reconciled to you and me! Let us read that again: it pleased the Father to be reconciled to you and me!

But reconciliation could only take place if Calvary happened: there needed to be a sacrificial shedding of blood.

I remember walking through the streets of a Christian community that lives in the rubbish dump of Cairo, and seeing freshly spilt blood mixed in the soil from recently slaughtered animals, and it hit home to me that sin is messy, and sacrifice is messy: there is nothing pleasant about it.

Except for the result: peace with God – forgiveness.

And the extent of Calvary is far-reaching: it even includes the ultimate restoration of creation, where we shall one day

experience a new heaven and a new earth which will be The Good Life defined!

Righteousness will be the value of eternity, along with love and joy and peace: all because Jesus went through Calvary.

Isn't that worth praising God for?

Day 22: Extreme Makeover

***And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind,
doing evil deeds...Col 1:21***

Isn't Paul just being a tad extreme here? His choice of words seem over the top: alienated...hostile...evil.

After all, most of the unbelievers I know are pretty nice people (in fact, I've met some pretty scary Christians!): they're not exactly Pol Pot or Hitler or the likes of them. But then again, they're not exactly Mother Teresa either.

God never uses humanity as the reference point for goodness, but Himself.

And in the light of that, one could argue that Paul is almost understating the case! The truth is that in comparison to God, our minds and will and action reveal a mindset and lifestyle that is far, far short of God's required standard (Rom 3:23).

We are all natural born rebels, no matter how charming and cute we were when we first entered this world. It does not take long for the rebellion to reveal itself!

And being honest with ourselves on who we really are without Christ is the first step to salvation.

It's also the path to spiritual growth. The gospel doesn't only save us, it grows us too. Jesus is a specialist in doing extreme makeovers!

Day 23: Meet the Real Me...

...he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him...Col 1:22

So, since you got up this morning, what has been passing through your mind? What came out of your mouth?

Would you characterise yourself, based on your answers to the above questions, as being 'holy and blameless and above reproach?'

I didn't think so. And yet, this is how we are presented before God (the righteousness of Christ is given to us as a gift), and it is how we shall be presented one day!

It's really hard to believe isn't it?

And this is all God's idea: that we would be reconciled to Him.

And so the Incarnation took place for the purpose of Calvary, so that we can be reconciled to God.

And in our journey of faith, we need to commit ourselves to staying the course, and allow God to transform us.

In doing so, we shall enjoy the reconciliation even more.

Day 24: Fickle or Faithful?

...if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. Col 1:23

Children of God have been granted such a glorious hope and privilege, that the very real temptation would be to become complacent.

We have no grounds to become complacent, and we have every reason to remain stable and steadfast: we have a sure foundation in Christ, we have a solid message through the gospel, and it is a message that is still being proclaimed today throughout the world. God's kingdom is still advancing.

Unfortunately, 'stable and steadfast' remains a challenge for many. Whether it be through emotional instability (such as easily taking offence) or the knack for church hopping, 'stable and steadfast' is not always the norm for Christians.

When this is the case, we need to ask on what foundation we are standing on: why have we shifted in our hope of the gospel? In what form has the self-idolatry revealed itself (think about what you wanted which wasn't given or you felt was taken away, such as recognition)?

I confess to being quite the expert in fickleness and am so grateful for the lessons that I am learning in being stable and steadfast. It's all rooted in Christ and His Gospel!

Day 25: Joy-filled suffering

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake...Col 1:24

In a decidedly suffering-avoidance culture, these are pretty bizarre words to read!

But Paul's approach to life wasn't rooted in 21st century western culture – in fact, even though his upbringing was rooted in Judaism, he was counter-cultural within his own context too!

Why?

Because he encountered the risen Christ, and that gave him a whole new perspective on suffering, which permeates his letters.

Paul didn't do stoicism either, which approached, or should I rather say received, suffering without the display of feelings or complaint. No – Paul rejoiced!

Paul knew that his calling was going to come at a price. He knew that advancing the kingdom of God could not happen through a preference for prosperity.

But if suffering was the by-product of people meeting Jesus, then so be it. It's an absolute privilege to be used of God!

And isn't it incredible; that because Paul was willing to pay the price, you and I get to know God and His ways over 2000 years later!

Day 26: The Privilege of Persecution

...and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church...

Col 1:24

What could possibly be lacking in Christ's afflictions?

We can be certain that this is NOT referring to incomplete suffering upon Calvary, because Paul has been quite clear that the atoning work of Christ was completed at Calvary. This is also reinforced by the fact that the specific word used for affliction (Greek thlipseon) in the above verse is never used in reference to the suffering of Christ upon the cross.

Remember how Jesus once said in a post resurrection appearance that "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you (John 20:21)?" The suffering of Christ was not limited to Calvary: He endured hardship throughout His life because of His mission: being a light in enemy territory has consequences.

Through the suffering of His physical body upon Calvary, Christ redeemed His church; through the suffering of His mystical body, Christ grows His church.

A bit of a bold word for me to use I know, but consider this: On the road to Damascus, Paul heard Jesus say these words: "Why do you persecute me?" Our Lord is not suddenly unfeeling because He is now resurrected!

Consider also 2 Cor 4: 7-12 (please look it up!), as well as Phil 3:8-11. Such is the union between the believer and Christ that we do not undergo the suffering alone, Christ experiences it through us too. We live in a kingdom of paradox.

And the suffering of Christ through Paul was not yet complete, and as long as the kingdom is advancing, and believers are growing, Christ still experiences the persecution too, but He is the One sustaining us through it. Church history shows that the growth of the believers has always come at a cost to someone.

And the attitude of Paul to this suffering? It was a source of joy! I love the description of MacPhail:

“You may occasionally hear the clang of the Roman chain, but you never hear a groan from the brave prisoner”

Paul wanted to be used of God, and in doing so knew there was a price to be paid. It was a privilege for him to be a persecuted instrument.

The prize of the Person Jesus was simply so much greater.

Day 27: Whose life?

...that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.

Col 1:25 &26

There's that word 'saint' again!

Paul has been sharing on the privilege of his sufferings, and that it was a joy for him to experience this. That's what you call passion for the body of Christ! He knew what his calling was, what it entailed, and understood the privilege of it.

And his ministry still continues today in a very real sense, as not only did he make the word of God fully known within his own context, he is still used of God today through the preservation of his letters which is also part of God's Word.

His life was not his own, he was simply a steward of it.

Such a different attitude to what we get taught and exposed to today! "It's your life...make it count!"

No – "It's God's life...live it well!"

Our lives are a gift of God, and the life lived for the self is a wasted life, no matter how many toys we end up with.

But a life lived celebrating the mystery which Paul refers to – that's a different story. But more about that on Monday!

Day 28: Celebrate the Mystery

To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Col 1:27

As a Jew living in the Biblical era, you would have been quite content with the truth that the Messiah was for the sole benefit of the Jews.

Except it wasn't true.

And the significance that salvation was now being extended to all people (the Gentiles) was clearly a mindset adjustment: look at the rich language Paul uses: "the riches of the glory of this mystery."

What was once a mystery has now been revealed: Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Folks, in the body of Christ especially, (to quote my minister friend Rod) there is no race in grace (apart from the spelling!). Jew or Gentile, Christ indwells the believer regardless of their background, culture, status or whatever human labels we might apply.

For the child of God, the indwelling Christ is not a matter of mere intellect: it represents nothing less than a restorative and transformative hope grounded in the character and glory of God. We shall one day have complete salvation in the very physical presence of Christ Himself. That's a promise.

Day 29: Growing Pains

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ – Col 1:28

If Christ represents the centrality of the purposes of God, then it is Christ we must proclaim. The message of the gospel is not a collection of rules, but glad submission to a Ruler: the person of Jesus Christ.

In Christ alone do we find the fulfilment of all of humanity's deepest longings.

But in sharing Christ we need to share the whole truth. Just this morning my daughter shared a message from school that 'everyone was awesome.' I knew straight away which Scripture verse had been used (Psalm 139:13&14). I had to point out that while we were indeed wonderfully made by God, the Bible also teaches us that we are all sinners in need of salvation – and truth be told, when we give our lives to Christ, then He can begin the journey of making us truly awesome!

So the gospel involves warning, as well as teaching. We grow through the gospel, and we can never fully plumb the depths of God! We don't teach for the sake of knowledge (because that has a knack for puffing people up), but we teach for the purpose of knowledge application to life: wisdom (which has a knack for inducing humility). We teach and learn in order to grow, because maturity is an expectation of God for us.

Day 30: Did Paul drink Coffee?

For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. Colossians 1:29

To hear some people, one would think that being involved in ministry should be a breeze.

Not for the Apostle Paul. Take note of the words he uses: toil...struggling. From our results and prosperity driven culture, those words seem to be a bit out of place.

Surely if God is within us through the Holy Spirit we should be walking in perpetual victory?

Paul understood more than many of us put together the reality of the spiritual battle he was in.

And so he worked hard, very hard. But he did not rely on his own strength. He makes it very clear that it is because of God's sustaining grace that he works so hard.

When we look at the life of Paul, we do indeed see a man who worked very hard and went through intense hardship. It's clear that God sustained Him.

How wonderful to know that as we seek to live for God wherever He has planted us, we can also know His sustaining grace and strength to assist us and work within us.

And I'm not talking about coffee...

Day 31: Struggling in prayer

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face...Colossians 2:1

Paul was a phenomenal pastor.

Recalling imagery from the fighting arena (think gladiator), Paul is open about the intensity of the struggle he has engaged in over the Christians at Colosse and Laodicea: none of whom he had met!

Given the fact that he was under house arrest at this time, chained to a Roman soldier (imagine what those guys went through!), what was this struggle that he engaged in?

Prayer. Genuine, heartfelt, anguished prayer.

Paul understood better than any of us the reality that we are in a battle field and not a playing field.

And it is a battle that we are still engaged in. What a wonderful privilege to know that we can still engage and use the most powerful weapon we have: prayer.

I am privileged to have friends that serve on the frontlines of faith. I am even more privileged that I can share in their work on the frontlines by engaging in this simple yet profound invitation from God: Intercessory prayer.

It's an area where I still need tremendous growth, but a weak man praying through Jesus is still a powerful weapon.

Day 32: Paul's Prayer for you

...that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ...Col 2:2

I love the prayers of Paul for God's people – they always reflect a passion for believers to be fully and totally enraptured by Christ. Paul knows all too well that there are many outside influences that would seek to distract from the central call of the child of God: to be Christ focussed in all things.

For example, error has a way of bringing division and weakening the body and witness of believers. Paul however prays that the believers would instead be encouraged, and I just love that image: *knit together in love*. When the body stands together, we are stronger.

Tragically, being knit together in love is not always a reality achieved – goodness knows how many churches have had the experience of being torn apart rather than knit together! I've known many a godly person to experience pain because of the selfishness of others.

But if we are to grow spiritually, then we need the body. More than that, we need to be part of a body of believers that have a settled conviction with respect to the call of Christ – anything less would be to deprive ourselves of the fullness of God. I believe they call that religion.

Day 33: Pursue Him

...which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Col 2:3

Do you desire wisdom? Pursue Christ.

Do you desire knowledge? Pursue Christ.

Do you desire true treasure? Pursue Christ.

Do you desire love? Pursue Christ.

Do you desire truth? Pursue Christ.

But pursue Him not for all these benefits, lest you end up worshipping yourself.

Pursue Him simply for who He is.

He is beautiful, and worthy of worship.

Day 34: Don't get deluded!

I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. Colossians 2:4&5

Paul has until this point made it clear about the necessity of holding to the centrality of Christ.

If we do not do this, we run the very real risk of being deluded with plausible arguments.

There was a heresy facing the church, and the best protection against being deceived (which Paul will again reiterate later) is to hold fast to the truth.

Paul expresses gratitude that these believers are seeking to remain firm in Christ.

It is a warning that still needs to be heeded today. I can't help but cringe when I walk into certain "Christian" book stores, as it is peppered with distortions of the gospel.

Jesus Himself is the truth: He is the One we hold onto. To know Jesus means we can spot a heresy a mile away!

May 'good order and firmness of faith' be characteristic of us!

Day 35: Keep Walking...

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him. Colossians 2:6

Any student that has been trained within a Baptist context will tell you that “when you see a ‘therefore’ you must see what it is there for!”

Paul has been highlighting just how central Christ is, and commended these Christians for standing firm in their faith in Christ. Their faith is not in a tradition, but in a person.

They mustn’t stop: they need to continue walking in the Lord. Walking implies steady progress to a destination, and that is an apt picture for Christian living, although I know it does often seem that we also take a few steps backwards at times!

But if we are born again, then that means we have received Christ Jesus the Lord. We have received the Anointed One of God (Christ), who entered our human history as Saviour (Jesus), and we know Him to be sovereign over all (Lord).

It is so important to understand that Christ calls us to ‘walk in Him.’ We have been called into a relationship, not a contract where we say a prayer and try to tick the boxes of obligation. Imagine a marriage where the spouses say “I Do” on the wedding day and then go on to live their own lives and live on an obligation basis. It will be clear that their heart is just not in it.

Let that not be true of our walk with God!

Day 36: Growing in Christ

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Col 2:6&7

Rooted and built up... don't you just love that image? It is a beautiful picture of our walk in Christ.

Christ is the source of our life (being rooted), and Christ is the One who also builds us up. Being built up is an ongoing process, and everyday life is our opportunity to grow through honouring Christ through the way we live.

As we remain rooted and allow Christ to build us up, so we shall find ourselves being continually strengthened (established).

But we can also be co-participants in this strengthening. Delving into the depths of truth revealed in Scripture is a marvellous way to strengthen our faith. We are called to grow in our knowledge of the truth, so that we can remain in it and not fall into error.

However, there is an important attitude needed as we explore the depths of God and His truth: an attitude of thanksgiving. Few things are more intolerable than a person who is puffed up by his Bible knowledge.

An attitude of thanksgiving will always point us and keep us focussed on God.

Day 37: Please Perceive

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. Colossians 2:8

Paul was not even writing in an age of social media, and the words written need to be heeded now more than ever!

Social media has become fertile ground for false ideas, and if we do not discern, we truly will become captive to wrong philosophy and empty deceit.

Human reason is indeed a wonderful gift, but it has a horrible knack for going awry. Every generation has had its popular cultural and political philosophies (human tradition) which have been challenging to Christians and to which Christians have had to remain grounded in truth. Once sentence of Divine Revelation trumps a library of human philosophy any day. As Christians our faith is not anti-reason, but it is rooted in revelation.

As for the elemental spirits Paul makes reference to, this is most probably referring to the nature of the heresy that the Colossians were facing, as later on (in 2:18) Paul makes reference to not being deceived by teachings involving the worship of angels.

I am sure none of us would admit to worshipping lesser spirits, but let us not forget that we do live in a spiritual world, and ungodly influences are everywhere!

Let's rather stick to the person of Jesus and His gospel! Let Jesus and His gospel influence our outlook, and nothing else.

Day 38: Our Human God

For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily...Col 2:9

Jesus is God in human form.

Any teaching that would seek to make Jesus less than He is, is false.

Any teaching that would seek to imply that we need other elements to be acceptable to God, whether that be submission to 'elemental spirits (v8), or obedience to specific laws and traditions, or even worse a so-called prophet in charge of a congregation, is also false.

Jesus is our mediator. Jesus is the One who makes us acceptable to God.

Jesus knows what it is to be human because He is (dwell on that for a bit).

He experienced life on earth in human form, and He arose in human form, but glorified (which is what we will experience one day!). We will one day recognise Him by His humanity induced wounds.

Jesus is fully God, nothing less.

It's an astounding and marvellous mystery, and He is with you.

Walk with Him, speak to Him, let Him live through you as you go about your daily life.

Day 39: In Christ Alone

...and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority – Colossians 2:10

This is amazing. We do not need any other mediator other than Jesus, because children of God are already in Him. We share in the very life of God!

This has deep implications for us. To adapt what H M Carson says in his commentary on Colossians: Before Christ (BC ☺):

I was spiritually incomplete, because I was not in touch with God.

I was morally incomplete, because I could not keep the standard of God.

I was psychologically incomplete, because sin affected my reasoning powers and I could not understand spiritual truths.

But, now that I am in Christ:

I am spiritually complete because I have been reconciled to God.

I am morally complete because I am clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

I am psychologically complete, because the Holy Spirit has opened my eyes to understand and receive the Gospel.

It's not what you know, but Who you know!

Day 40: Circumcised Hearts

In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ. Col 2:11

The Old Testament sign of being part of the covenant people of God was circumcision. As Paul explains in Romans 4:11, this sign was given to Abraham as a seal of the faith which had already been expressed.

It was a picture of sin removal, and a picture of the source of our problem: human nature.

But a person could be outwardly circumcised and far from God because their lives did not reflect a love for God and His ways.

Nowadays we can wear a cross around our neck, but it doesn't mean we are Christian and acceptable to God. A cross around our neck cannot change us, because the reality is we actually need to be crucified to it!

But through Calvary, Christ has dealt with our fundamental human problem: sin infected human nature. Christ has enabled a circumcision, a cutting away, of sin to take place.

As we all know, sin has a knack for sticking around, but the good news is that we no longer have to submit to its authority. We have a new authority: Jesus, and He has defeated sin and has given us a circumcised heart – a cleansed heart. Let's walk in that!

Day 41: A Question of Identity

...having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. Col 2:12

Who do you identify with?

In today's age, identity has become a very fluid concept, with online identities being created that have no resemblance to the actual real life of the person.

Under the Old Covenant, the rite of circumcision, along with various other observances, identified one as being a Jew, and this meant you were part of the covenant people of God.

As pointed out yesterday, it was easy to be one in form only, and not in the heart.

When children of God go through the waters of baptism, they are making a public declaration to the physical and spiritual world that they are identifying with Jesus Christ. Through faith they declare that they have died to their old self and are now walking in the new resurrection life of Christ. God's power is at work within them to die to the old way of life.

The key words here are 'through faith.' It is tragically possible to go through the waters and simply come out wet.

Which is a terrible waste. May we truly identify with Christ!

Day 42: Spiritual Forensics

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses...Col 2:13

According to a spiritual forensic analysis, children of God were formerly dead. In fact, deadness was our life: we sinned in our actions, and those actions were rooted in a sinful nature. We simply were not interested in obeying God. We were separated from God. For these Gentile Colossians, their uncircumcised flesh was a symbol of the alienation from God.

A picture of humanity in general: far from God. Now I am going to make this personal:

A phenomenal miracle happened: even though I was outside of the realm of covenant relationship with God and had no hope of getting in, God did something.

He resurrected me from my deadness. He made me spiritually alive. He made me family.

He forgave me.

And it was all God.

The only thing I did was to respond with gratitude when my eyes were opened.

I'm not dead anymore – that forensic report is no longer valid.

Day 43: #Not Condemned

...by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

Col 2:14

Imagine the bank taking the bond statement of your house and erasing from it the amount of money you owe. Imagine the bank going a step further, and tearing up that piece of paper and throwing it away (or erasing it from the computer system). You have no more debt.

Like I said...imagine!

Children of God have had a far more serious debt erased and disposed of.

If we read through the law of God, it will not take long to realise that each of us stands indebted to God: we have to receive divine justice. In a very real sense, the law actually became our enemy, because it condemned us.

But God cancelled that debt!

The death of Christ was the death of condemnation via the law.

Jesus, the perfect Son of God, who knew no sin, received on our behalf the penalty of sin due to us. He paid the debt.

This means that the way has been opened to be in relationship with God. As John Wesley rapturously wrote: No condemnation now I dread! Jesus and all in Him is mine!

Day 44: Cross-shaped Chariot

He disarmed the rulers and authorities, and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. Col 2:15

This is quite a picture: Roman generals would parade their conquered and humiliated enemies behind their chariot in their victory procession.

Imagine you were one of the people in the crowd cheering the General for his accomplishment. Imagine one of the defeated prisoners trying to scare you by making a noise at you and pulling a scary face and shaking his fists at you.

You would probably think it quite comical – after all, what can a defeated prisoner do to you?

When it comes to Satan and his demons, Christians can fall into one of two extremes: they can take him too seriously or too flippantly.

What we need to always hold before us is the cross. It was here that Satan received his defeat: the cross was a chariot in disguise! Even at His weakest and nailed to a cross, our Lord was still too powerful for the enemy.

Just like D-Day was the day of defeat for Germany, but the allied forces still needed to go in and finish the job, so as Christians we need to still engage in the task of advancing God's Kingdom and being agents of setting the captives free. There will still be resistance, but its resistance from a defeated enemy.

Day 45: Don't Syncretise

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Colossians 2:16&17

It is clear that Paul has been addressing some form of false teaching and heresy in this letter to the Christians at Colossae. We're not sure of the entire body of teaching, but we pick up clues in this letter which help us to reconstruct some of the ideas in conjunction which fit the background in which these Christians found themselves in this town.

We see a clear Jewish element with reference to the Sabbath, but other verses we have considered so far also make reference to angelic beings and, given the Greco-Roman background, there seems to be have some merging of pagan and Jewish concepts into a somewhat esoteric philosophical system of thought. Out of this comes the notion of having to keep strict observance of various religious feasts and days, in order to placate the powers that determine human destiny.

But if Christ is above all powers, why would we want to submit to lesser powers? If Christ has completely fulfilled the law and we can be found in Him, why would we want to place ourselves in bondage again by trying to earn salvation?

In Christ alone our hope is found: the shadow of the law dissipates in the light of the gospel.

Day 46: Discernment Required

Let no one disqualify you, insisting on ascetism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. Colossians 2:18&19

These verses represent two of the most difficult verses in the New Testament in terms of understanding: we praise God for God-fearing translators!

At the heart of the issue is that the Colossians Christians were being exposed to teachings that were not in line with the Gospel. They wanted to add to it. Discernment was required; and discernment is still required today. There are many distortions of Christianity out there today, whether it be in the form of cults and secret societies, or pastor-centred churches (am referring to churches where the pastor is a controlling figure rather than a serving one), or churches where the focus is on syncretising the gospel with cultural elements. Beware any pastor claiming special revelations, visions or skills which you need to honour for blessing!

Focus on the head of the body: the Lord Jesus Christ. If you lose your connection, you are susceptible to all sorts of deceptions. But if you focus on Christ within the context of a Christ focussed body of believers, you have the recipe for spiritual growth.

Day 47: Set Free

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations – “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” (referring to things that all perish as they are used) – according to human precepts and teachings? Col 2:20-22

Paul’s passion for the gospel of Jesus is truly palpable. With passionate logic he points out the absurdity of trying to submit to legalistic ritual observances as the means of achieving salvation.

Things of the earth are temporary, but what Christ offers is eternal. We have permission to enjoy the gifts, but let us do so in the context of celebrating the Giver!

The strict dietary restrictions imposed by these false teachers were not accomplishing anything in the way of salvation or holiness; that can only come by dying to trying to earn salvation and instead embracing Christ.

It’s easy to follow rules and think we’re getting somewhere, but God came to set us free from ritualistic observances as a means of salvation. As He spoke through the prophet Isaiah:

Because this people draw near with their mouth and honour me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men, therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people...(check it out in Isaiah 29:13-24)

Day 48: Indulge the Spirit, Not the Flesh

These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and ascetism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. Col 2:23

It was Dallas Willard who said that grace is not opposed to effort, but to earning.

These false ideas that Paul is speaking against valued strong asceticism and acts of devotion, but whilst it looked impressive from the observer point of view, the reality is that the only thing it could ultimately accomplish is feed pride. The reason being that when you engage in such acts to try and procure brownie points with God in terms of earning salvation, you simply run the risk of being proud and self-righteous as you think you are doing better than others!

Such actions cannot change you.

There is a marked difference however in engaging in tried and tested spiritual disciplines out of a desire to grow in one's living relationship with the Living Lord. Here the motivation is not to try and earn salvation and points, or to try and twist and manipulate God, but simply to grow closer to the Lord so that He can have more of you.

That is how we can change: by allowing the indwelling Christ to have more of us!

Day 49: Be heavenly minded

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. Colossians 3:1&2

“It is typical of Paul that having laid a doctrinal foundation he proceeds to erect an ethical superstructure. Hence we have the transition here from theological statement to practical precept. The Christian, he says, has experienced a radical change of spiritual environment and this should affect his whole mode of life. Having been raised with Christ he now moves in a new sphere. This should mean that he has a new aim in life. Normal human ambition is in terms of this world. But the one who has been raised with Christ sees things from an eternal perspective, and so should aim that his life on earth should be dominated by the pattern of life seen in the glorified Christ. (Carson, Colossians and Philemon p79)”

I decided to quote directly because I thought it was very well put!

In addition, since the right hand of God represents the place of holiness, intercession and power, and we’re called to set our minds there, so we too need to aim in growing in holiness, in depth of prayer and spiritual power; in short: be God-focused. I know you’re not there yet, but be encouraged: the goal is progress, not perfection – Jesus will take care of the latter.

Day 50: Dead and Alive

***For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
Col 3:3***

What do you mean I have died? I'm still walking around aren't I?

Everyone is dead to something or someone. The Gospel message is about making people aware of their deadness to God.

When however we recognise this and ask to receive the new life Christ brings, we're then dead to something else: the world.

But if you're anything like me, I seem to have this knack for resurrecting to the world.

Which is why I need to keep my focus on God. It's an amazing statement that is made by Paul: for you have died...

In an age where people don't even know what the self is anymore, it really reveals a totally different perspective on life in that we no longer have to define ourselves in terms of the categories the world offers. We live by a different value system; more than that, we live for a different Person: Jesus.

Not everyone is going to get it, and living in Christ means you're going to irk (to put it mildly) quite a few people along the way. One day, however, the life that is now hidden will be fully revealed. Faith will no longer be needed.

Day 51: Which glory: earth or heaven?

When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Col 3:4

Read that verse again.

And again.

Monday mornings are a superb litmus test for how we are living in Christ, or perhaps we should rather say how we are allowing Christ to live through us!

Christ is not only the source of our new life, but He also continues to sustain us through life as well.

And as we have noted, not everyone will believe, not everyone will take us seriously. In fact, we can expect to be ridiculed and persecuted for what we believe.

The tables will one day be turned. Jesus will be vindicated when He comes again, and we shall also be vindicated. It's quite something to know that we will one day appear with Jesus in glory.

It's a reminder that this earth is not everything, so stop living as if it were. Planning to retire with a huge bank balance? What a waste! That huge bank balance is equivalent to a small chip of pavement in heaven.

May we live with eternity in view; eternal glory is way better than earthly glory, which will fade away. A focus on the eternal gives us proper perspective for the present.

Day 52: Living for Love

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Col 3:5

The Christian life is about living out inward reality.

In the light of what Paul has already shared about how children of God have died to their former selves and how we live in Christ, Paul goes on to share what this means in the practical realm.

Christians are called to get rid of certain behaviours and attitudes. Five vices get mentioned above. Four have to do with sex and the last one (which can also obviously be sexually related) is coveting.

In other words, children of God are called to have a different approach to sex. We see it as a gift of God to be celebrated within marriage, because the significance goes way beyond pleasure.

It is not a popular message today within the church; many think the 'church has an issue with sex'. The Church doesn't 'have an issue' – the human heart has an issue with submission to God's requirements. Sinful nature wants to worship the gift within unrestrained freedom. That's called idolatry and only leads to self-imposed slavery.

God does not want us to see people as commodities of lust, but as persons to be loved; lust will never be able to redeem.

Day 53: Live in Love, not wrath

***On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them.
Col 3:6&7***

Yes, there really is such a thing as the wrath of God. This is the bad news of Scripture.

People who want to live their own way without reference to God will experience God's anger.

It's discomfoting I know: most people would prefer a cosmic doting grandad for a God.

In the light of the fact that living in such a way is dishonouring to God, why would we want to live like that? Paul reminds us again that type of living has to do with the old life, before we encountered Christ.

And so we have reason to be glad for the Good News. Had God not reached out to us, we would still be under His wrath.

Isn't that motivation to live life differently?

Day 54: Throwing old clothes out

But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Col 3:8

In comparison to where we used to live, in the environment of sin, children of God now live in a new environment: that of the presence of Christ.

As a result, we are called to live differently. We're to treat sins like dirty clothes: take them off. Whereas the sins mentioned previously dealt with primarily sexual impurity, these sins here deal with our attitude and speech.

I believe there is a place for anger, but it's a small place, because you and I don't exactly match God in terms of righteousness. God tells us to be careful with anger, because our fallenness doesn't know how to handle it. When I get angry, I have to remind myself of my fallenness and my penchant for getting things wrong. I have found that human anger has a knack for masquerading as self-righteousness, which kind of nullifies whatever reason you might be angry for in the first place. Put it away – rather be generous in forgiveness. As a friend of mine wrote recently, we need to live in the currency of love, because tragically anger is the only currency many people know.

Being malicious and slanderous are not virtues either, and neither is obscene and abusive talk. I know this all sounds obvious; so why are we being told? I think you know the answer!

Day 55: Don't lie to Truth

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Col 3:9&10

“So – how you’re doing?” “I’m fine thanks...”

It seems so obvious doesn't it? We follow Jesus who is the Truth, so therefore we should stop lying to one another. How often are we not fine when someone asks? How often when we are probed do we hide others from the truth?

It reminds me of a song that goes “Lord, you took me out of Egypt, now please take Egypt out of me.”

Paul reminds us that when we become children of God, to sin is actually the unnatural thing to do in terms of behaviour that should correspond to our new nature.

And God really has given us a new nature. God really is at work within us, renewing us and transforming us into His image.

So it is not about trying harder, but about cooperating with God. As we grow in the knowledge of God, so we grow in the knowledge of truth.

Why feed the old life with our lies, when we can walk in the new life in truth?

Day 56: No Race in Grace

Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. Colossians 3:11

In in the natural world, humanity makes distinctions between people based on a number of variables: the colour of the skin, the area a person grew up in, the language a person speaks. In the verse above, Paul is describing the type of distinctions that existed in that day, and it wasn't just the distinction, but associated attitudes that went with it. Some thought they were superior, and treated others with disdain.

Just like today.

Distinctions are natural, and some distinctions are needed (such as male and female!). However, within the body of Christ, these distinctions are to have absolutely no significance in the way we relate to each other. We have absolutely no grounds for an attitude of inferiority or superiority, because Christ is Lord over all. We have put on the new self which is being renewed in the image of God. Our reference point for relationship is Jesus.

I love the way my minister put it: there is no race in grace (well, other than in the spelling!). The church has a real opportunity here; to reveal to the world that when you're in love with Jesus, you can truly love one another.

Grace to the human race – what a privilege to share!

Day 57: Time for a new outfit!

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience...Colossians 3:12

Sometimes I wish there was a pass mark in Christianity. But then I realise I actually don't want a pass mark, because I still wouldn't pass, because I would be relying on my own strength!

I love how Paul prefaces the list of virtues with which we are to clothe ourselves (you have to replace those old clothes you threw out remember?). Paul reminds us of who we are: we are chosen by God, loved by God, and set apart by God for His purpose.

This is a truth that needs to penetrate our hearts, because only then do we have proper incentive to clothe ourselves with these garments. If we try to clothe ourselves with these garments out of trying to fulfil a moral requirement by God, then we're going to land up in the trap of trying to earn favour with God. That just leads to self-righteousness.

When we understand the grace that has been extended to us, we respond by clothing ourselves in this way simply because we are grateful to God for His love to us, and we want to reveal that God to those around us.

Let's get dressed!

Day 58: Check your clothing

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience...Colossians 3:12

Let's explore this outfit a little closer...

Compassion: to show tenderness to those who are less fortunate and suffering.

Kindness: A combination of goodness, kindness and graciousness, as opposed to, for example, severity (see Romans 11:22 for a sobering comparison)

Humility: to think lowly of ourselves in the sense of understanding our true nature and what we truly deserve.
Note: This is very different from self-esteem.

Meekness: This, along with humility, were not considered virtues at the time (and still don't seem to be considered virtues today). It's the opposite of self-assertiveness and arrogance, and is revealed through having a special concern for the rights and feelings of others.

Patience: the capacity for self-restraint, especially when one has been insulted or injured -i.e you don't quickly retaliate.

These are the clothes we are called to wear, the virtues that people see when they look at us.

If you're having a sense of inadequacy, this is good. If you're thinking you're on track, check out number 3.

Day 59: What Patience looks like

...bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive – Col 3:13

We ended off yesterday with the virtue of patience, and the above verse is really an extension of that virtue, explaining how patience would reveal itself in the life of the body.

Firstly, we're called to bear with one another. You know that irritating behaviour of that other person in your life that really just irks you? Well, accept it. In my life I call such persons 'sanctification facilitators.' In my carnality I get a measure of satisfaction knowing that I am returning the favour! I have a long way to go...

And how we need to be quick to forgive! The bitter pill to swallow is that none of us deserve forgiveness. So often we want to say of another person "but they don't deserve forgiveness for how they have treated me!"

But our God has forgiven us, so we have no grounds to refuse forgiveness to others. Within the body of Christ, this virtue is absolutely essential to healthy body life.

I think the pain of forgiveness is one of the purest forms of worship I know. It is then that we get a very small taste of the love God has for us, understanding that He loved us even though we were quite content to leave Him on the cross.

Day 60: The Love of God

And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Colossians 3:14

I didn't get to watch much of the Royal Wedding, but I heard about the love sermon, so thanks to modern technology I was able to do a search and watch it. I could be wrong, but somehow I don't think that 'chapel' has ever experienced such impassioned preaching! Bishop Curry did his surname justice. I regard it as a definite divine appointment when a man takes the opportunity to passionately share the gospel to a listening world – if you have not heard it, please listen to it, because it is incredibly appropriate to today's text as well!

In the above text, after telling us the clothes that we need to wear, Paul instructs us to put on top of everything the garment of love. Love is the glue that binds all those other attributes together. If those attributes are not rooted in love, then we might have an attitude of moral duty, but have you ever been on the receiving end of someone who was nice to you but only out of duty or obligation? Its awful! How wonderful that the love of God to us is not rooted in moral duty, but a loving delight in His children. The love God has is a sacrificial redemptive love, as revealed through Calvary. That's just who God is – willing to give Himself so that the likes of you and me can live. And nothing can separate us from that love (Romans 8). Can we please, please not be selfish with this love and share it with others?

Day 61: Peace Bro!

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. Col 3:15

It is not a good sign when people want to leave the church because of conflict. It tragically happens all too often. This verse tells us that it is not meant to.

There is a sense in which, within a proper functioning body of Christ, we are called to be peace keepers; to a world characterised by conflict, the church is a haven.

Sometimes conflict is unavoidable, simply because we are dealing with the human heart, and so often we have this notion that we are to be umpires in the lives of others instead of servants. Here is a useful relational truth: you are responsible to others, not for others. In other words, you cannot control or change the behaviour of other people, but you can love them, serve them, share your heart when you see them go astray: but you cannot change them.

Only the Holy Spirit can do that. That understanding will facilitate an attitude of peace towards those around you. The umpire within the body of Christ and within our heart is meant to be peace. Not bitterness or resentments or anger, but peace. This is why part of prayerful decision making is governed by peace as an indicator of the direction to take. The wisdom in working towards a peaceful body is that it creates the space for bringing about internal change. Which is something we all need!

Day 62: Thankfulness

And be thankful. Col 3:15b

Is it just me or is there a lot of moaning and grumbling going on? From Trump to Malema, people find reasons to moan, as if we were somehow surprised to find people behaving the way they do.

To be thankful is really to have a very different spirit in today's world. Children of God have many reasons to be thankful.

We can be thankful for the peace we have with God, and for the peace God has with us!

We can be thankful for the many manifestations of mercy God has shown to us.

Thankfulness to God helps develop humility and kill egoism. This is a huge help in facilitating peace within the body of Christ.

We can also be thankful to God for the people in our lives – even those whom we seem to find a bit trying in our lives (which gives you a clue as to why they are there...).

Bottom line: its very difficult to know and experience peace without an attitude of gratitude.

So start counting those blessings!

Day 63: Being God Sensitive

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Col 3:16

How much space do we make for the gospel in our hearts? It can only influence our lives to the extent that we treasure it above anything else.

And we are called to encourage one another in living out this gospel. It's clear that Paul has in mind a gathering of believers, because it really is in community that the gospel is lived out. The encouragement and teaching of gospel truths is even to saturate our songs, which means we need to examine what we sing and ask for whose benefit the song is for. Our gatherings are meant to be God-sensitive.

God is calling us to depth in Him, not ego stroking frivolity.

Let us respond with gratitude to the invitation, because "Amazing love! How can it be? That Thou my God should die for me?"

Day 64: All of Christ

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Col 3:17

That really sums it up doesn't it? In all things, we live as unto the Lord, with thankfulness. This is what worship is: a life offered to the Lord, not merely a song on Sunday.

The business deal: as unto the Lord

The way we relate to colleagues: as unto the Lord

The way we relate to family: as unto the Lord

The way we spend our money: as unto the Lord

The way we relate to those we disagree with: as unto the Lord

The way we relate to those who disagree with us: as unto the Lord

The way we steward our time: as unto the Lord

In other words, may we be found embracing all of Christ for all of life!

Day 65: Submissive Wives

***Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.
Colossians 3:18***

I can truthfully say that not all of Scripture applies to me:-)
It's not this verse that bothers me, but the next which we shall consider tomorrow. No husband needs to worry about this verse, because it touches on an issue between your wife and God. The next verse, however, if you are a husband, does concern you very much!

Submission is not a popular concept these days, but it is one which is essential for the proper functioning of society. Problems arise when the principle of complementary reciprocity is forgotten (remember the Golden Rule?). If a person insists on acting independently, or if a person abuses their authority, then problems will arise!

What does it mean for a wife to submit? Let me put a different twist to it: it means allowing the husband to experience the consequence of his actions!

It simply means to voluntarily defer to her husband when he is leading in a godly way: take note of the important phrase "in the Lord." Submission is not only appropriate in a gospel context, but I believe should also define the boundaries. Chauvinists will probably have an issue with what I have just said...

I remember having a discussion back in my student days with a fellow student who had a feminist orientation to life (and appropriately so). We were discussing the submission issue, and I posed the question that if her husband treated her as Jesus would treat her, would she submit?

“Of course” was her reply.

So husbands – sorry – I turned this into a reflection about you! And more coming tomorrow:-)

Day 66: A Word for Husbands

Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.
Col 3:19

Just in case you didn't get it men, the above text says:
Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.

A lot of marital issues would be resolved following this simple injunction.

Our calling is to display that agape love that Christ revealed. This is not a love that seeks self-satisfaction, but rather is focussed on devotion to the lady that said "I do" to you. Think of it as a calling to continually seek out your wife's best interests! Don't focus on her submission, focus on your love.

And no, it does not come naturally to us, because let's be honest, we have a propensity to selfishness (I am putting it mildly)! However, when we are poor in spirit, God is rich in grace.

And another thing: ditch the attitude. Don't be so quick to be cross with your wife: remember again that she said "I do" to you!

So my very humble suggestion to you is this: cherish her!

In fact, why not get some flowers (not self-raising) or some other special treat for her today and tell her that you truly appreciate her!

Day 67: A Word for Dads

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Colossians 3:20

To respect and obey authority is a fundamental lesson that children need to learn if you ultimately want a governable society.

For those of us who are dads, we have a phenomenal responsibility placed upon us. We shape our children's view of God!

And, as is evidence all around us, it is easy for dads to take out their issues on vulnerable children. This is wrong.

As dads, we are called to shepherd the hearts of our children (I can really recommend the book called *Shepherding a Child's Heart* by Tedd Tripp), and we need to be sensitive to where our children are at; to learn the art of gentle toughness/firmness! You want to encourage them to grow, but you cannot be unreasonable in expectations either. A discouraged child will not blossom.

It's how God our Father is with us. He knows how to grow us!

So – to the dads out there, pray for wisdom, and may the Lord bless you as you seek to raise your child in a God honouring way!

Day 68: Slaving Away?

Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Colossians 3:22

No one likes the idea of slavery in the Bible, and rightly so. It was however a reality, and for many the only way of having a living (not unlike having a Domestic Worker in the home, except no salary!). Slaves were simply regarded as an institution, and in terms of tasks ranged from menial tasks through to professionals such as doctors and teachers.

Paul is speaking within the context of the household in these verses (wives, husbands and children have been addressed), and slaves were also part of the household.

By actually addressing slaves as morally responsible persons and giving explanation for his instructions (as we see in the above verse), Paul was already breaking social norms. Slaves were regarded as property, not people. Undoubtedly Philemon and Onesimus were in mind as well (see Paul's letter to Philemon). The Gospel brings a new redemptive dynamic to relationships!

But the principle that Paul teaches here does not only apply to slaves, but to all of us. Instead of the word slaves, put your own name there. Imagine society with that kind of work ethic!

Day 69: Who do you work for?

***Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.
Colossians 3:23&24***

It's easy to get discouraged at work, especially if you're treated like a mule rather than a person! But this was the reality for slaves: they were not seen as persons, and yet Paul reinforces the truth that they are: these slaves within the congregation who had perhaps been purchased by earthly masters, had also been purchased and redeemed by Christ Himself: loving authority personified!

Let us not forget that while we might be serving under human authority, we are in fact serving the Lord. This means our work is no longer work, but worship. Our work is no longer a means to an end, but a sacred vocation, a calling.

When I was working for a children's party company in London all those years ago, we were sitting in the pub with the vicar of our church (from whom the company rented premises), and I remember joking with my boss that I preferred the vicar's boss: she replied that wasn't fair because there was no comparison!

And she's right: there isn't. When we understand that we are in fact working for the Lord, it transforms our motivation. Can you think of anyone better to work for? Benefits are out of this world!

Day 70: Make it Count

For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. Colossians 3:25

Whether you are a slave who wants to take chances because of how you are treated, or whether you are a master who thinks you can treat your slave however you like, you need to understand that we will all stand before God one day, and all earthly positions will cease.

Put in more modern terms: whether you are a worker who is not impressed with the salary and treatment you get, or an employer or business person who focuses on looking out for number one (and it isn't God), we again need to understand that we shall stand before God, and what will matter is how you lived the life given to you.

This is an incredibly sobering verse for me. I think its because I unfortunately recognise a Jonah element within me: its ok for God to punish people I don't like, but surely I'm ok?

Our God is a moral God; there is such a thing as right and wrong. And because God's judgements are absolutely just and fair and right, I know that should encourage me. But it kind of scares me (that Jonah thing again...).

May God increase my capacity¹ for Him to live in and through me! Only then will I not need to fear that day. I want to live a delightfully serious kingdom life. How about you?

¹ See the book Capacity, by Mike at www.incontextinternational.org/store/

Day 71: Justice Trumps Charity

Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. Colossians 4:1

If God were to treat you the way you treat the person you employ (from the gardener through to staff in a business), would you be happy?

In one simple instruction, Paul does a lot more than upset the proverbial apple cart: he provides the way to revolutionise what was in those days an accepted social institution: slavery.

If treating workers justly and fairly were a way of life, then there wouldn't be a need for trade unions. As Maclaren observes,² Paul didn't counsel masters to give their slaves 'what is kind and patronising. He wants a great deal more than that. Charity likes to come in and supply wants which would never have been felt had there been equity. An ounce of justice is sometimes worth a ton of charity.'

Or, as my friend Gustav puts it: "Like Job (see Job 31:13-15), Christians should be known as people of justice – not just justice for some, but justice for all. When people see how we treat everybody with equal justice, they will see we are different, because although the world preaches justice, it does not practise it. Let's show God's character to the world

² Quoted in The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Colossians, p220

by dealing justly with everybody, no matter what their position might be.

To that I say a hearty "Amen!"

Day 72: Let's Pray!

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. Colossians 4:2

To paraphrase that expression about being lost in thought, I wonder how many of us would have to confess to getting lost in prayer as it is unfamiliar territory?

God knows the human heart all too well; thoughts wander, distractions vie for our attention, and so we are called to persevere and persist in prayer, because this is an area of life which is so easy to neglect! I love the fact that we are called to be thankful in prayer, and certainly in my life I can testify to how being thankful has a way of energising prayer!

Prayer is such a wonderful privilege and gift. Isn't it wonderful to know that we can approach God and in doing so it is not us taking initiative to communicate with God but rather us responding to His invitation?

Consider these lines from a puritan prayer:

“O God of the open ear, teach me to live by prayer as well as by providence...give me a heart frameable to they will; so might I live in prayer, and honour thee, being kept from evil, known and unknown...let me know that the work of prayer is to bring my will to thine, and that without this it is folly to pray...” (from The Valley of Vision)

So, lets pray!

Day 73: Keep Praying

At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison – that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. Colossians 4:3&4

The Apostle Paul, arguably the greatest missionary ever, is asking for prayer for an open door.

He's in prison at the moment, and so at one level, being set free to continue his ministry is a logical request.

But Paul was also a man that recognised his continual dependency upon the Holy Spirit to share the gospel well (see also Eph 6:19&20), so he is also asking for prayer that he would share it well.

Paul's passion was to make Jesus known, and all the extreme hardships he went through faded into insignificance in comparison to knowing the person of Jesus.

But no matter how advanced we may see ourselves spiritually (which is dangerous ground), we must never ever lose sight of our need for prayer.

And as we seek to be a witness, let us do so in the atmosphere of prayer, so that we can be sensitive to the opportunities that God gives us!

Don't stop praying for the advancement of the gospel, and please pray for those who serve on the frontlines.

Day 74: Need a Wisdom Download?

Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Colossians 4:5

I sometimes think we have a knack (perhaps not consciously) for treating instructions in Scripture as advice as opposed to a command.

What an impact the observance of this command would make!

We are currently living in what has been termed a 'post-Christian' culture, and it is not unlike the cultural set up that the early Christians found themselves in. Christianity is just another idea amongst the plethora of belief options out there, with Christianity having a knack for being singled out as a target of antagonism.

Before you open your mouth about Christ, understand that you have probably already been watched and observed.

And so we need God's wisdom (available to us through His Spirit/Word) in how we relate to those outside of the faith. You don't treat them from the basis of your ego driven rights, but on the foundation that they carry the Imago Dei, the image of God.

And we need to redeem the opportunities given to us, because the opportunity clock is also ticking.

Day 75: Don't Insult; be salt

Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Colossians 4:6

In an age where speech is being increasingly characterised by hate, where opinions are entrenching the polarising extremes of us and them, and opinions even being confused for facts, this command really hits home that as Christians we are not to be of this world, but really do represent an alternative way. Unfortunately we don't exactly get this right either.

God has extended grace to us, and so it is only appropriate that we not only walk in grace, but speak it too! Understanding how God has treated us really does not give us grounds to be boastful before others.

Our words need to be like salt on food: adding flavour! It's easy to criticize and condemn, it takes absolutely no effort at all to loudly proclaim your opinion on why others are wrong (and through that bolster your own ego), and very easy indeed to let angry expletives roll off the tongue.

But we are called to a different path. Even when we disagree and need to point out error, we can do so in a way that is gracious and seasoned with salt. Did Jesus not come from the Father full of grace and truth?

Day 76: Be a Tychicus

Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts...Colossians 4:7&8

Paul was not a lone ranger. He was able to be the missionary that he was because he had people in his life that supported him.

I speak on behalf of those in ministry today. In ministry, to have people support you is an incredibly precious and beautiful thing. People are incredibly fickle (which you don't need to be in ministry to discover!), and it doesn't take much to be on the receiving end from someone who has taken offence.

And Paul had his share of backstabbers. Actually, he literally had his back flogged – five times (that's excluding the three times of being beaten with rods).

But more precious to Paul were those who supported him, who were God's instruments in enabling him to keep moving forward. Look at this description: beloved brother...faithful minister...fellow servant.

That is something we can all aspire to: To be a blessing to those serving on the frontlines – what a privilege! That is God's design: advancing the Kingdom of God together.

Day 77: He ain't heavy...He's my brother

...and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here. Colossians 4:9

There are obviously a lot of people I want to meet in heaven, and Onesimus is one of them. How is it that a runaway slave came under the ministry of Paul the prisoner and gave his life to the Lord? The sovereignty of God is the answer to that question, but I want to know how it came about! And what was the reunion like between him and his 'owner' Philemon after the powerful letter Paul wrote?

Paul doesn't see the runaway slave as an inferior person, but as a brother in Christ. And he makes this clear to the congregation in Colossae as well (who is one of you). In his appeal to Philemon, he urges him to operate from the principle of brotherly love first out of love for Christ.

I am presuming Philemon responded as appealed to. Can you imagine what a witness that must have been?

It is so easy to get caught up in our rights mentality. It is so easy to put ourselves first and justify our actions, especially when money is involved.

Whatever circumstances you may find yourself in in terms of your work environment, may God grant you the grace and wisdom to operate from love of Him first. It won't always be easy, but it will always be right.

Day 78: The Currency of Love

Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions – if he comes to you, welcome him), and Jesus, who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.

Colossians 4:10&11

Of the six people that Paul mentions, only three (mentioned above) are Jewish Christians. Paul was not an unfeeling man, and he felt in his heart the pain of alienation that he did from his own people.

I am sure none of us would like to write a letter in which we mention our fellow prisoners! The reference here can be spiritual in that they gladly saw themselves as prisoners of Christ, although there was a time back in Ephesus when the two of them were arrested together (see Acts 19:29).

Nonetheless, Paul has companions with him who have travelled with him, and Paul is truly grateful. Their ministry to him has been one of comfort, and the word for comfort, which is only used here in the NT, has the meaning of relief from pain. The body of Christ needs these special people!

Mark also gets a special mention, and this is significant because there had been a rift between them about 10 years earlier, and healing and reconciliation had now taken place. In Christ, healing is indeed possible – even relational healing!

Day 79: Thank you Pastor Epaphras

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.

Colossians 4:12&13

Epaphras was a true pastor. He was the one who founded this church, and then took the trouble to seek out Paul a few years later because of strange teaching that was infiltrating the church. Remaining true to the gospel was incredibly important, and not just as an intellectual exercise.

The description given about him reveals a man who truly loved and cared for those under his care. He is described as 'struggling' on behalf of them in his prayers, so this is a man who practiced anguished intercession.

He longed to see those under his care reach maturity in Christ. Paul also points out how Epaphras has worked hard, giving a picture of working to the point of pain (I imagine this is a reference to emotional distress).

A true pastor indeed. Loving those under his care, experiencing pain on their behalf which the congregation probably may not have been aware of. An anguished intercessor lifting the sheep up to the throne of grace.

And because of him, we have this letter to the Colossians.

Day 80: Which Road: Luke Lane or Demas Drive?

***Luke, the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas.
Colossians 4:14***

It's here that we learn that Luke was a doctor, and we also know that he was a true companion and blessing to Paul. It is Luke who shares with us a lot of Paul's life through the book of Acts. He stood by Paul through thick and thin! He was clearly a man of deep faith.

In contrast we have Demas. Demas gets a mention here and in Philemon 24. In 2 Timothy 4:10 however we learn of something tragic: Demas had deserted Paul because he loved this world.

How is it that he could walk with such deep men of faith and still choose a different road? Was his own faith reliant on others to keep it going? Did he not grow roots in terms of his own walk?

Demas is a sobering reminder to all of us to watch our walk. Any of us can fall into the trap of simply desiring something else more than God.

Our walk is not about trying to get the balance right between Jesus and the world. We are called to have Christ upon the throne of our hearts.

It's an incredible privilege to have Him there. That's what discipleship is all about: following Jesus.

Day 81: This letter is for your church too

Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. Colossians 4:15&16

As we draw this letter to a close, we see that Paul had in mind not just the church at Colossae, but a wider circulation to Laodicea as well. I do wonder if Paul ever envisaged the circulation his letters have today?

It tells us that what has been written was not only for a specific situation, but has broader application as well – even to us in the 21st Century! How amazing is that?

There is also a small reminder that a church is not defined by the building you meet in, but rather by the community of believers. Church buildings really only came about from the third century onwards.

As for that other letter which is made reference to, we're not quite sure about it. The primary consensus seems to be that it is either a letter that has been lost, or it may possibly be Ephesians.

All of these things remind us that Christianity grew within the context of real people in real places (such as Nympha who made her house available) who also had real issues and needed real help! And God hasn't stopped working.

Day 82: Are you watching?

And say to Archippus, “See that you fulfil the ministry that you have received in the Lord.” Colossians 4:17

Sometimes I feel that my life is a series of unfinished tasks. Maintenance around the house, personal projects not yet finished, emails not yet attended to. If it were not for my neck, I probably would have lost my head by now!

So I am looking at this verse and putting my own name there: I encourage you to do the same.

Each and every one of us have received a calling, an assignment, from the Lord. Walking with the Lord does not happen by accident. It requires focus and intentionality. Spiritual growth is not a haphazard process, although it may feel like it at times!

So perhaps its time we each just simply spent some time reflecting on where we're at in our walk with God. Is our walk a priority? Is our focus on how we can honour Him? Or has that old not-so-subtle self-idolatry crept in as we expect God to do things for us? We need to be on our watch, which is why Archippus gets warned to 'see that.'

May God draw us deeper in Himself, and may we never, ever be satisfied with where we are at in our walk with God, but always seek to desire more and more.

Let growing in Christ be our desire and goal.

Day 83: Grace be with you

I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Colossians 4:18

Paul would normally dictate his letters, and then end the letters with his own handwriting. It was the personal touch which would have had the result of strengthening the bond between them, as well as adding authenticity and authority.

He has covered deep truths in this letter, and even though he was not personally involved in the founding of this church, he nonetheless had a deep love for them.

He wrote it to ensure that they do not fall into error, as there was teaching which on the surface had the appearance of Christianity, but was in truth deceptive heresy. Although in this false teaching Christ was not denied, He was nonetheless dethroned. The statement of Christ's supremacy is truly powerful (1:15-20).

Paul covered a lot of ground in this letter, and it would be worth your while to take some time and read it in one sitting. Imagine that you are in that original church and that you are hearing it being read, knowing that this is penned by the famous apostle that you have heard so much about.

And just as Paul began the letter, so he ends it, and with the same words we bring this devotional series to a close:

Grace be with you.