

Daily Bible Reading



ECCLESIASTES
PHILIPPIANS
COLOSSIANS
PSALMS

St Paul's | REAL
Anglican | HOPE
JESUS

Term 3 2022

ECCLESIASTES**PHILIPPIANS THEN COLOSSIANS****PSALMS**

Mon

Tue

Wed

Thu

Fri

Sat

Sun

WEEK 1

- Ecclesiastes 1:1-11
- Ecclesiastes 1:12-18
- Philippians 1:1-6
- Philippians 1:7-11
- Philippians 1:12-18
- Philippians 1:19-26
- Psalm 1

WEEK 2

- Ecclesiastes 2:1-17
- 1 Corinthians 15:50-58
- Philippians: 1:27-30
- Philippians 2:1-4
- Philippians 2:5-11
- Philippians 2:12-18
- Psalm 2

WEEK 3

- Ecclesiastes 3:1-8
- Ecclesiastes 3:9-15
- Philippians 2:19-30
- Philippians 3:1-7
- Philippians 3:8-11
- Philippians 3:12-16
- Psalm 3

WEEK 4

- Ecclesiastes 3:16-22
- Ecclesiastes 4:1-12
- Philippians 3:17-21
- Philippians 4:1-7
- Philippians 4:8-9
- Philippians 4:10-13
- Psalm 4

WEEK 5

- Ecclesiastes 5:1-7
- Ecclesiastes 5:10-20
- Philippians 4:14-18
- Philippians 4:19-23
- Colossians 1:1-8
- Colossians 1:9-14
- Psalm 5

WEEK 6

- Ecclesiastes 7:1-4
- Ecclesiastes 7:15-18
- Colossians 1:15-20
- Colossians 1:21-23
- Colossians 1:24-29
- Colossians 2:1-5
- Psalm 6

WEEK 7

- Ecclesiastes 9:1-6
- Ecclesiastes 9:7-10
- Colossians 2:6-12
- Colossians 2:13-19
- Colossians 2:20-23
- Colossians 3:1-7
- Psalm 7

WEEK 8

- Ecclesiastes 9:11-12
- Ecclesiastes 9:13-18
- Colossians 3:8-11
- Colossians 3:12-14
- Colossians 3:15-17
- Colossians 3:18-21
- Psalm 8

WEEK 9

- Ecclesiastes 12:1-8
- Ecclesiastes 12:9-14
- Colossians 3:22-4:1
- Colossians 4:2-6
- Colossians 4:7-18
- Colossians 4:9
- Psalm 9

Foreword

As Christians we not only believe that God speaks to us through his Word...

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness”
(2 Timothy 3:16)

...but that the opportunity to listen to him is precious.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”
(Psalm 119:105)

Through the pages of the Bible we meet Jesus, the true Word of God. So, use these notes to help you regularly open your Bible and – even if it is only for a few minutes in your day – listen to God’s Word. Allow it to challenge, comfort or encourage you, and point you to Jesus. We hope this leads you into prayer and assists you to commit each day to do “the good works God has prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10).

Elizabeth Cox, on behalf of the St. Paul’s Daily Bible Reading Team.

Sign up for Daily Bible Reading emails that will be sent to your inbox from 25th July, 2022.



Listen to our Spotify playlist as you meditate on the truths in Ecclesiastes.



This is the first time we’ve done this and we would appreciate your feedback!



The Vanity of All Things

Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

The teacher is giving us a reality check of what life is really like under the sun. He tells us it's all a mist, a fog. This is how he introduces the whole book!

1. What is the nature of life as expressed in these verses? (vv4-9)
2. 'Look! This is something new!' Why is this a false statement? (vv9-11)
3. How does his reflection challenge your expectation of making a legacy for yourself (v11) or filling your eyes with seeing and your ears with hearing? (v8)

In an age where our society places so much faith in our own human power and progress, the teacher gives this bitter but freeing pill for us to swallow: there is nothing new under the sun.

Pray: Ask God to give you wisdom to expect what is healthy to expect in this life, and to trust him to be the one who will say, "Behold, I am making all things new." (Revelation 21:5)

What is Crooked Cannot Be Straightened

Read Ecclesiastes 1:12-18

The impact of using the phrase “chasing after the wind” is that it is clearly a pointless and meaningless exercise. You can never capture the wind. You can’t win at this game.

The teacher applies his mind to study and explore this world “under heaven.” He concludes that the things done under the sun are a “chasing after the wind” (vv12-14). After all, the best of our work and efforts still fail to fix all the problems we have in life. “What is crooked cannot be straightened, what is lacking cannot be counted” (v15). It is a part of our wealth and life in a first world country that can lull us into thinking that all crooked things can be straightened. So we look to human ingenuity, power and will as the hope to fix all.

The teacher is giving us a reality check: some broken things simply can’t be fixed. More than that, no matter how much wisdom you attain, even the wisdom of Solomon (v16) can’t undo all that is broken and fill all that is lacking. We need to sit with this truth which helps us expect again, the right things in this fallen world. Having sat with it, may God then give us the hope we need to wait for his timing, because he makes all things beautiful in its time.

Whilst he may very well change our circumstances as we seek help, may God help us as we remember Jesus’ promise: “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!”” (Revelation 21:4-5)

Pray: Ask God to give you today the wisdom to expect the right things from this life, to accept that life isn’t ideal, to trust in him to change what he may and ultimately to make all things new.

Introduction to Philippians

Context

The account of Paul (with Silas and others) bringing the gospel to Philippi (an important city in the Roman Empire) can be found in Acts 16:11–40. It appears to have been a fairly brief yet eventful visit, with at least two converts (and their households) – Lydia (a dealer in purple cloth) and the jailer (who had experienced both Paul and Silas praying and singing despite having been flogged and placed in the stocks – and their refusal to leave the prison despite their miraculous release). Some indication of the “hostile” environment of Philippi can be seen in the fact that Paul and Silas were falsely accused of creating an uproar after silencing a slave girl whose “gift” for predicting the future earned her owners money.

Message

Philippians has been called “a joyful letter” but with an “undercurrent... a sober realisation that time is running out.”¹ Its author, the apostle Paul is writing from prison, facing a possible death sentence, to a new and often divided church which was facing persecution from an increasingly hostile world, exacerbated by false teaching within the fellowship itself.

Does some of this sound familiar to our 21st century ears? While physical persecution is not our lot in Australia, around the world there are many places where Christians are under threat. Although our churches are 2000 years old, we are still often saddened by false teaching and by the lack of unity within the body of Christ. We are also tempted to lose heart.

Philippians will help us face this world with hopeful obedience and faithful perseverance with its focus on unity and joyful partnership with each other as we face an increasingly hostile world. Paul calls us to be united in Christ our Saviour and Lord, ever conscious that “he is their message to the world and their chief prize when this passing world is done.”²

¹ Alec Motyer, *The Message of Philippians* (BST) 1984 p11

² Motyer, p23

Greetings and Partnership

Read Philippians 1:1-6

Whose partnership in the gospel are you thankful for? Bring them to mind as you read these opening verses.

Paul's letter opens with a wonderful acknowledgement of the reality of the body of Christ. It is written from two servants of Christ Jesus in one place (in fact in a Roman gaol) to "all the saints in Christ Jesus" at another place (Philippi).

Paul and Timothy's greeting reaffirms that they are all – though physically distant – united in God their Father and under the Lordship of Christ. The familiar greeting "grace and peace to you" packs a hefty theological punch: only through the mercy and grace of the Father – acting through Christ's sacrificial death – can we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's comments about his prayers for the Philippians remind us to be constantly thankful for those who partner with us – and to let them know the joy their partnership gives us. How often do we encourage each other like this? In fact, sometimes we are prone to either take Christian brothers and sisters for granted or be critical of some area of their life where they don't come up to our standards.

Paul's confidence that we can trust each other to Christ – that Christ Himself will bring to completion the good work He began in our Christian friends – is a great reassurance of the work of the Holy Spirit in growing each one of us and a helpful reminder to commit each other to Him in hard times or times when we ourselves can't meet and encourage them personally.

Pray: Thank God for your "partners in the gospel," reassuring yourself that God will bring His work to completion in them (even though you may be far from them or unable to see them much at this time). Pray for one of them specifically.

Prayer for Christian Growth

Read Philippians 1:7-11

Think of Christian friends who you “hold in your heart.”

1. In vv7-8, what motivates Paul's prayers for these “partners in God's grace”?
2. Paul's prayer is not just a vague prayer about helping people to love better, but it is not a “to do” list either. List (or highlight/underline) the kind of growth in love that Paul prays for in vv9-11.
3. What might love that is growing in “knowledge and every kind of insight” (based not on your own efforts but Christ's love for you) look like? How would it bless others and yourself? What steps could you take to encourage this type of growth in love?

Pray: vv9-11 for at least one Christian friend.

Do: Encourage your friend by letting them know you are praying for them. You could also ask them to pray this for you!

Even Chains Advance the Gospel

Read Philippians 1:12-18

Look back on your life and remind yourself of God's faithfulness in difficult times.

If Paul is writing from Rome then "what has happened to me/my situation" encompasses false accusations and vilification, flogging, imprisonment, shipwrecks, chains and long periods of uncertainty as to his fate (see Acts 21-27).

Yet here he is using his heartfelt testimony of God's sovereignty through suffering to encourage the Philippians. In Romans 1:16, Paul proclaims "I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation of everyone who believes." We see here that his own commitment to share the gospel, even with his guards (v13), has encouraged others to also speak up – a lesson to us that our own boldness in sharing can encourage others to do the same.

He realistically admits that even in this central task, some of those who call themselves Christians are motivated by envy and rivalry (v15), thinking to stir up more trouble for Paul. Humanly speaking, this must have been discouraging, but his decision to choose selfless joy rather than self-pity brings the focus back to the all-importance of the spread of the gospel.

What a reminder to us to be equally single minded, not allowing any personal differences to take our focus off the main thing – that Christ is preached!

Reflect: How might you use your personal testimony of God's goodness in difficult times to "advance the Gospel"?

To Live is Christ

Read Philippians 1:19-26

"I know who holds the future and I know He holds my hand."³

Can you sing this confidently?

1. In these verses, what is Paul certain of ("knows" or even has a "certain hope" of) and what doesn't he know yet?
2. Why would Paul say that "dying is gain"? (v21)
3. Why does Paul think it is vital that he remains "in the body"? (v22, vv24-25)
4. How can you be as confident as Paul – that although you don't know your future, both life and death hold no fear?

Reflect: Paul loved the Lord with an abounding love and yearned to be in Jesus' presence. He had two dominating motives: "I live on so that others may grow in Christ and that Christ may be glorified in me."⁴ What motivates you to live for Christ? Commit your future – whatever it entails – to him.

³ Ira Stumphill, 1950 "I Know Who Holds Tomorrow"

⁴ Alec Motyer, The Message of Philippians, BST p91

Do You Sit Like the Righteous? Or Walk Like The Wicked?

Read Psalm 1

How are we blessed? This is the question the first psalm poses to us, and to answer this question the psalm introduces us to two types of people: the righteous and the wicked. The righteous are those who are in a right relationship with God and the wicked are not. In v2, the righteous are those whose “delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.” We see this illustrated in v3: the righteous person is like a tree who has planted themselves on the steady and life-giving stream of God’s laws which yield fruit, strength and prosperity. The wicked in their pride, ignore this. They do not plant themselves by this stream and instead are blown about by the wind like loose grass (v4) and are led to destruction instead of blessing.

It can be so easy to be like the wicked at this time, to be “tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming” (Ephesians 4:14). Our world is full of teaching and ideology that can blow us this way and that. But it is futile and it fades; it appears certain at one point in history and is despised the next.

This way of thinking can lead us to destruction. Instead, blessed is the one who plants themselves on God’s Law and his Word which “is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

Pray: Praise God for his law and his Word; that he did not leave us in the dark, but as creator revealed to his creatures the way to blessing in the world he made.

Repent for when you have ignored God and his Word out of pride and have been blown elsewhere to other streams of knowledge which lead to destruction and not blessing.

Plead with God to plant you by the stream of his Word so that you never stray from it to be blown about by the teaching of our age. Pray that through this he will bless you and bear fruit in your life to bless others, as he longs to do.

Vanity of Pleasure and Toil

Read Ecclesiastes 2:1-17

Pray: "God, give me wisdom today, your wisdom from above that is pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. I offer myself up as a living sacrifice, fully to you, fully for you. In Jesus name, Amen."

1. The teacher is testing himself with pleasure but concludes that it is vain. What were his projects according to vv3-10?
2. He then turns to consider wisdom, madness and folly (v12). What does he have to say about the advantages and disadvantages of being wise? (vv13-16)
3. The teacher arrives at the same conclusion for the pursuit of both pleasure and wisdom (v11, v17). It is all in vain; a chasing after the wind. Death is the great equaliser (v15). In what ways are your current pursuits reflective or not reflective of the fact that you will die (should Jesus not return in your lifetime)?

Pray: Ask God to give you the sober mindedness to view all things in light of your temporary stay on this earth and to view your pursuits in light of the death of both yourself and those around you.

Victory Through Our Lord Jesus Christ

Read 1 Corinthians 15:50–58

Yesterday we looked at the great equaliser: death. This passage today lifts our eyes to see our future beyond death. We will be changed in the resurrection (vv51–52). God will kill this great equaliser – death – and remove its victory over us (v55).

In this life, we live as though traveling through a valley of tears. Our bodies break down and we only need to look around to see sin, brokenness and decay. So much is good but death is a great cloud that casts its shadow over all (v56). Eventually all we love will die. It is easy to despair, but the 'But' in v57 is a great hinge: "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." God will give us the victory through Jesus. He will give us a life beyond death, an inheritance in his kingdom (v50). Not only us, but anyone who trust in him. Thus, the hope of all humanity rests on Jesus. Do you believe this?

When we realise this truth, it creates the 'therefore' of v58 – it provides the reason for work that is devoted to the Lord, gospel work! Gospel work means life in this valley of tears is not all that there is. Gospel work, at last, is the labour that is not in vain. It may feel like we are chasing the wind in many things – but this is the one thing we can count on to count. The gospel gives life beyond death.

Reflect: What do you give yourself fully to? How can you be giving yourself fully to gospel work? God will enable you to stand firm and let nothing move you. Give yourself fully to the work of the Lord knowing your labour is not in vain.

Living Worthily Despite Opposition, The Steadfast Church

Read Philippians 1:27-30

Think over your past week. Do you need to ask for forgiveness for times when your actions or words have not been “worthy of the gospel of Christ”?

Although most of us in the West do not “suffer for Christ” (v29), we do go out each day as ambassadors for Him, sometimes into situations (family, workplace, social media) that are hostile to the gospel we long to share. This passage calls us to reflect on whether we are representing Christ well in those places. Are we conducting ourselves (in both words and actions) in a manner worthy of our Saviour (v27)? Are we a light pointing others to Christ or a stumbling block in their way?

Paul reminds us that this includes unity in a steadfast church – standing together, unafraid, even when opponents are powerful and influential (v28). He combines the ideas of “standing firm in one spirit and one mind” with “contending side by side” which seems to imply that we need to be both firm in our fellowship and prayer together and proactive in spreading the gospel in the world.

Despite these military terms, we are reminded in Scripture that our witness is to be characterised – not by aggression – but by speech which is gracious and respectful (seasoned with salt) and loving action. “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Peter 2:12).

Pray: For Christians around the world who face the realities of physical persecution and suffering daily. Pray that they will remain steadfast.

Pray for our own boldness in supporting them and in “striving together as one for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27).

Unity in Christ

Read Philippians 2:1-4

"I love my Growth Group. We are all concerned about each other and not just ourselves. We are united in love for Christ." Is this true for you?

1. The "Therefore if" in v1 asks us to base our attitude of unity to each other (same mind, love, purpose) on the blessings we have already received in Christ. What are these blessings?
2. Unity is vital. How do vv3-4 give practical steps to achieving this?
3. Do these kinds of motivations and attitudes characterise your relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ in your Growth Group and at church? Where might you need to repent and ask for help to change?

Pray: That within our church there will be unity of love and purpose based on our fellowship in the Spirit and the humility that comes from knowing Christ died for each of us sinners.

Christ's Humility and Exaltation

Read Philippians 2:5-11

Read the passage a second time and reflect in gratitude on all that Christ has done for you.

Christ's humility should constantly amaze and humble us. His choice to give up his place in heaven – to “empty himself” and to take on our human form and experience, then suffer and to die in our place – should overwhelm us with gratitude (vv5–8).

But, beginning in v9, we are reminded that this was not the end of the story. We worship a risen Saviour to whom all creation will bow and acknowledge him as Lord.

Christ's incarnation, death, resurrection and his eventual return in triumph are the basis of our faith and our certain hope for eternity with him.

But his willing sacrifice can also remind us that we too should be willing to sacrifice our own comfort and status for the sake of his gospel.

Reflect: Is there some area of your life where you are resisting a sacrifice (of time, money, status or comfort) for the sake of the gospel because it is too hard or too much? Reflect on what Christ was willing to do for you and prayerfully bring the issue before God.

Shining Like Stars

Read Philippians 2:12-18

Jesus said, “I am the Light of the World,” and also asks us to, “let your light shine before men that they may see your good words and praise your Father in heaven.”

What dark places will you light up today?

1. v12 instructs us to “continue to work out our salvation with fear and trembling” (“awe and reverence” in some translations). How does v13 reassure us that our salvation does not depend on our own efforts?
2. In vv14–16 it is exciting to read that we are “children of God... shining like stars... as we hold out the word of life.” How might this glorious calling be helped by the very pragmatic instruction in v14?
3. Think back to the person who first shared the gospel with you or who discipled you in your early Christian walk. Would they be rejoicing in your cheerful obedience to the Lord? How might they rebuke or encourage you?

Pray: Ask for God's grace, strength and guidance in situations where you might be tempted to grumble and argue. Pray that you will be kept from fault and may somehow “hold out the word of life” in this situation.

God Laughs

Read Psalm 2

In this psalm, nations, peoples, kings and rulers rise up against God. They want to throw off the supposed 'shackles' of God's rule, reign and law. They want to live their own way, rule themselves their own way and disregard the God who made them.

And how does God respond? He laughs! He scoffs at them! He rebukes them in anger. To rebel against the rule of the God of heaven is to invoke his anger. He alone has the right and means to rule the nations. And God has anointed a king that he has installed on the throne of heaven to blot out this rebellion and rule these nations.

"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). God declares Jesus as his son, the anointed King of Kings and Lord of Lords. As God's anointed, Jesus deals with the people's rebellion in two different ways. He bears himself against God's righteous anger for man's rebellion, paying the debt with his own death, so that people might once again be able to live under his risen rule. The other way is that, for those who continue to resist God's will, he will deliver God's wrath. God tells him in v9, "You will break them with a rod of iron; you will dash them to pieces like pottery." It is a terrible thing to resist the rule of the Lord's anointed. So, we are warned: "Kiss his son, or he will be angry... Blessed are all who take refuge in him" (v12).

Pray: Exalt the God of heaven and earth, the Lord of Lords and the king of kings, the rightful ruler of all people. And praise him for his anointed king Jesus who will rule for ever and ever. He will bear the iron rod yet bless those who take refuge in him.

Say sorry for trying to resist and rebel against God and his anointed king; for all the times you ignore him and live life with your own rule and reign. Ask for his mercy.

Take refuge in his Son. Ask for his grace to help you to live under his rule.

Recognising Seasons in Life

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

This poem is sandwiched between two sections where we see the sovereignty of God in ordaining all things (2:24-26, 3:9-15). It speaks of seasons under the hand of our sovereign God and the real actions we partake in.

1. The teacher lists fourteen different seasons under heaven and their opposites. Re-read and write down in two columns (or highlight in different colours) the seasons and their opposites (vv2-8).
2. Reflecting on the above, which season do you think our world is allergic to? How is that healthy or unhealthy?
3. Which seasons do you delight in and which ones do you struggle to accept and let in?

Pray using your reflections from question 3:

"Lord, help me to trust in you. You ordain seasons and times for different matters. Help me to live under your rule, to recognise and understand the times you have put me in now so I can embrace what you want me to do: _____ and to refrain from: _____.
Help me to recognise that _____ is where you have placed me now and help me to live trusting in you."

Life is Foggy

Read Ecclesiastes 3:9–15

“Immortal, invisible, God only Wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes”⁵

Yesterday we focused on discerning our season and time in life. Today, however, the teacher gives us a counter truth, “No one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end” (v11). We work and toil but at the end of the day, in all our work, we can’t fathom God’s work (vv9–10). We can’t 100% discern what God is doing in our world and in our lives.

Over all ordained seasons is stamped this reality: God is sovereign, and we cannot fully grasp his choices.

This is a humbling truth that should stir fear in us. A right kind of fear that recognises God is much bigger than we are, and we can’t understand him. We can’t tell him what to do and we don’t fully understand what he is doing right now. He alone makes everything beautiful in its time. We don’t dictate the timeline, God does. We don’t make everything beautiful, God does. The world runs on his schedule, with his plans (v14).

After all, who could have ever reasoned that at the right time, God would be born of a woman – born under the law – to redeem those under the curse of the law? It’s unfathomable. The world in its wisdom did not know God through wisdom. And so, we should fear this great God who alone lives in unapproachable light, who is the only wise God. As we go through different seasons, may we fear our great God and recognise, with humility, that we can’t understand it all.

We can, however, each day thank him for the gift of enjoyment in our food, drink and work (v13).

Reflect: Where do you see your own pride? Pour out your heart to God and try praying Psalm 86 (especially v11).

⁵ Walter C Smith (1867)

Fellow Servants

Read Philippians 2:19–30

Are you willing to send close Christian brothers and sisters to serve others and advance the gospel – be it elsewhere in the city or overseas?

In today's passage we meet three servants of the one who himself took "the very nature of a servant" (v7). They each have deep affection for the other, but all are willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of the gospel.

Paul shows that, although in need of support and fellowship, he is willing to send those he values most (a "son" and a "brother") to the Philippians in order to encourage them. He is a wonderful example of someone who, thinking of the good of others, is willing to let go of his own human supports even in the most difficult of situations, for the sake of the gospel.

Timothy demonstrated a uniquely deep concern for the Philippians – mirroring Christ's own concern for his church. He is "like a son working with his father" (v22) serving with Paul, indicating Timothy's humble acceptance of a subordinate role in the service of the gospel. Timothy is an exemplar of the attitude advocated earlier in the chapter (vv3-4) of thinking of others before oneself.

Epaphroditus "risked his life" to bring comfort and support to Paul, who describes him in the highest terms as, "my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier" (v25). This is perhaps to build him up in the eyes of the Philippians as it will be Epaphroditus – not Paul or even Timothy at first – who will return to Philippi. But these descriptions (and the idea that Epaphroditus' death would have brought "sorrow upon sorrow" to the apostle) also let us see the relational cost Paul is prepared to pay for the benefit of his beloved Philippian brothers and sisters.

Pray: Ask God for a heart that puts the needs of the gospel and the support of young Christians first before our own need of support and friendship.

No Confidence in the Flesh

Read Philippians 3:1-7

What “human credentials” do you take pride in?

1. In vv2-3, what are the characteristics of the ones who “are the circumcision” in contrast to those who Paul angrily describes as “those who mutilate the flesh”?
2. Paul lists his own impressive “human credentials” in vv5-6, but then calls them “liabilities” or “losses.” What point is he trying to make from his own life experiences?
3. In v1 Paul repeats the phrase he has used often in this letter, “rejoice in the Lord.” How does a focus on the joy to be found in Jesus protect us from putting our trust in earthly status and achievement?

Reflect: What are the things that seem to give you “value” or “status” both in the world and in the church? Ask God to help you regard them appropriately (following Paul’s example) in light of Christ’s love and sacrifice.

Profit and Loss

Read Philippians 3:8-11

"All I once held dear, built my life upon
All this world reveres, and wars to own
All I once thought gain I have counted loss
Spent and worthless now, compared to this"⁶

Paul uses such strong language here – it can shock us from our own comfortable world where human achievement and success seem easily compatible with our Christian lives. All the credentials he has listed he not only counts as loss, but he regards them as rubbish or even “dung” in some translations.

Understanding comes when we realise what he is comparing these credentials to: “knowing Christ Jesus my Lord,” being “found in him,” and having “the righteousness that comes by way of Christ’s faithfulness.”

He is talking about God’s gracious gifts of forgiveness, new creation and eternal life that come through Christ’s suffering, death and resurrection. Nothing compares to this!

When we read v11, it is exciting to think about knowing Christ and experiencing the power of his resurrection, but far more daunting to think about being willing to “share in his sufferings” or even “to be like him in his death.” For Paul these were not just brave words, but a deep commitment to follow Christ’s example of obedience and sacrifice whatever the cost, even execution.

We, like Paul, need to focus on the “far greater value of knowing Christ” and trust in Christ’s faithfulness to bring us through whatever trials may come and keep us faithful to the end.

Reflect: “Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you, there is no greater thing.” Is this true for you? What do you need to put aside (count as rubbish) so that you can rely only on Christ’s faithfulness?

⁶ Graham Kendrick, “All I Once Held Dear...” 1993 Make Way Music

Pressing On Towards the Goal

Read Philippians 3:12-16

What are you striving for?

1. In this passage, the metaphor for the Christian life is a race or a climb. Write down the words that help you to see the effort and focus involved. Do these words apply to the way you approach your Christian life?
2. How does v12 remind us that we are striving for something that has already been won for us?
3. How does the idea of the “upward call of God in Christ Jesus” impact the way you live your daily life? Would you call yourself “single-minded”?

Reflect: How can you demonstrate your growing maturity in Christ by being more “forward focused” – responding daily to the “upward call of God in Christ Jesus”?

Will God Deliver Me?

Read Psalm 3

Has the world ever weighed on you so heavily that you lament, “Will God deliver me?”

This is where King David, the man after God’s own heart, finds himself while writing this psalm. David is writing this psalm on the run, hiding from his son Absalom, who has led a coup against him. Most of Israel has turned against him too. “How many are my foes,” he laments.

In this dire situation, those around David question his trust in God. They say, “God will not deliver him,” and it sounds like David, in his downcast state, is drawn to believe them. Then he remembers who his God is and what his God has done.

Do you ever feel like David? As if the world is caving in on you and everyone is against you?

The Bible tells us Christians that we should expect this. We are aliens and strangers in this world (1 Peter 2:11) – it is not our home – and the devil is prowling around waging war on us. He would like nothing better than for us to say, like those around David said to him, “God will not deliver him.” There will be times in life when we will lament, but like David, we can turn to our God in our lament.

“You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). God is our Father who is before and above all things, so in him, we can lie down and sleep and rest in him because he will deliver his children at the end of the age.

Reflect: If you are in this season of lament at the moment, remind yourself of your Father’s love for you and that “the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”

Rest in his grace, mercy and steadfast love.

If all is going well for you, store up this reminder for future difficult times and pray for a Christian brother or sister who needs to rest in these promises now.

Justice is Missing

Read Ecclesiastes 3:16–22

“It is mine to avenge, I will repay” (Deuteronomy 32:35a, quoted in Romans 12:19, Hebrews 10:30).

1. The teacher has seen that in the place of judgement (e.g. courts) where you expect justice you get wickedness instead (v16). What are the two things he “said” to himself about this? (v17, vv18–21)
2. What is his conclusion? (v22) How does that square with what we read in 1 Corinthians 15:50–58 a couple of weeks ago?
3. In this section we are faced with the reality that God is judge. Where do you see wickedness in place of justice? And what are the things you ‘say’ to yourself in those times? How can v17 and the resurrection of Christ encourage you?

Reflect: On the judgement of God and how you can look to him as the judge when there is wickedness in place of justice.

The Futility of Envy

Read Ecclesiastes 4:1-12

The teacher sees many things. Firstly, he sees oppression and power in the hands of oppressors with no reprieve for the oppressed (v1). So he asks, 'isn't it better to be dead, or unborn?' Secondly, he sees envy driving toil and achievement (v4). He says that it is meaningless. And then lastly, he sees a person all by themselves – no friends or family – but also no satisfaction or contentment from their toil or riches and, that too, is meaningless.

We will just focus on the second thing he sees, envy. And this passage asks some pretty stirring questions of us. Does our drive to skill-up and work to succeed come from our envy of others? Their houses, their job, their holidays, their family, their marks, their figure, their salary? Could it be that when we hear others share their latest news, or even visit someone in their house or turn on the TV, our aspirations are being shaped? Our work can be driven by envy of others; we aspire to have what they've got.

The teacher reminds us that this envy-driven quest is futile. It is as fruitless as chasing after the wind. Whilst we don't want to be fools that fold our hands to our own demise (v5), we also don't want to be those who are grabbing with both hands full with toil (v6). An envy of our neighbour makes us toil without sense or reason. After all, a handful with rest is better than two hands full with toil. Envy stops us from realising there is a time for work but also a time for rest. Work for God means we ought to respect God's design for work and rest. Work for God means giving thanks for our lot and being content.

Reflect: How are you going at being content today? Do you tend to fold your hands, or grab toil with both? Do you know when is enough?

Pray: Ask God to give you wisdom today to consider why you are working and whether envy comes into it. Pray that God will give you contentment and enable you to come into life with no folding of hands, or two hands full of toil, but a handful with rest.

Citizenship in Heaven

Read Philippians 3:17-21

Who do you imitate? Why?

Our behaviour stems both from those we imitate or emulate and from our own beliefs about where we belong and who we belong to.

Throughout this letter we have seen Paul's character and concerns displayed. Up to this point he has set us an example of someone who is a "slave of Christ," willing to live or die in his service of the Lord. He is concerned and praying for the spiritual growth of other believers and filled with joy even in difficult situations.

Paul calls the Philippians to imitate him (and others living this way) – not because he is perfect – but because we are all citizens of heaven and are longing for the return of Christ. Then, as a warning of the temptation to follow a contrasting pattern of behaviour and attitude, Paul puts forward a strong image in v19. He focuses on those who "think about earthly things," that is those who are self-indulgent ("their god is their belly") and have distorted values ("they glory in their shame"). He is clear that the root of the problem is that they are "enemies of the cross" and that this sort of life will lead to "destruction."

But it is not our lifestyle choices which save us, it is our trust in Jesus. In v21 we are reminded that we are waiting for our Saviour to return while also being dependent on His power to transform us.

Pray: That you will be an example to others of what it means to have your citizenship in heaven and not be focused on earthly things. Think about some practical choices which might set a good example for others.

Unity, Joy and Peace

Philippians 4:1-7

What prevents you from having joy and peace?

1. Paul calls for unity between Euodia and Syntyche and models this in the way he refers to the believers in Philippi, “dear friends,” “brothers and sisters,” “my joy and crown,” “whose names are in the book of life.” Thinking back over Philippians and the many appeals for unity, why is it so important to Paul that these two women “agree in the Lord”?
2. How would an attitude of consistent joy in the Lord (and in your fellow Christians) impact your life and your witness?
3. In what sense does the peace of God – which comes from an attitude of thankfulness and trusting him with our anxieties – “guard” our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus?

Reflect: Do you have anxieties or situations which are worrying you? Bring your concerns to God with thankfulness for His love and grace and ask for his peace to guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus

Thinking About Excellent Things

Read Philippians 4:8-9

What occupies your thoughts at the moment?

In Romans 12, we are encouraged to be renewed by the transforming of our minds so that we don't, any longer, conform to the patterns of this world... and so that we may discern God's good and perfect will.

It is true that what occupies our thoughts will impact every aspect of our lives – our attitudes, behaviour and speech.

In the 21st century the effort to focus only on “excellent or praiseworthy” things seems more of a struggle than ever, especially since the media is wedded to the idea that things that shock, outrage and provoke conflict or controversy will sell best and attract the largest audience.

This instruction is not about ignoring the evil in the world around us, and only seeing a lovely, happy society through rose-coloured glasses. But it does remind us to strive to focus only on those things which are “excellent.”

There is a saying that “what we pay attention to grows,” and surely, in a society which pays attention to loud angry voices or highlights and applauds sexual immorality, as Christians, we need to strive to pay attention to the truth, to beauty, to justice, to purity, to actions which are commendable, and to people who are worthy of respect instead.

As we read in the previous section, the peace of God comes when we cast our anxieties on him. But also, we are reminded to turn away from the voice of the world to all the blessings we find in the Word of God and in the world he created, and be thankful.

Pray: Ask God to help you to focus on “excellent things” and not to conform to any ungodly attitudes promoted by the world.

Contentment

Read Philippians 4:10-13

Would you say you are a “contented” person? Why/why not?

Very few of us, if any, could claim to be “content” while in prison – the victim of false accusations and hostility, facing an uncertain future which probably includes execution. Yet Paul’s claim seems genuine and heartfelt. So what is his “secret of contentment”?

1. Paul is both thankful for the Philippians support and eager to let them know that he is content and not in need (v11). How does this model the way we are to both encourage and support each other in difficult times?
2. Paul’s secret of contentment does not depend on his own “super-spirituality.” How does he explain his ability to cope and even thrive? (v13)
3. Looking back to vv5-7 what are some of the ways that Christ strengthens us so that we can be content in all circumstances?

Reflect: Are there areas of your life where you are not content? Bring your anxieties and concerns to Christ, and ask him to strengthen you and remind you that his grace is sufficient for all your needs.

Turning Towards the Light

Read Psalm 4

Where do you turn to in distress?

A famine over the nation of Israel is most likely what led David to write this psalm. In this drought, the people are turning to false gods (v2), most likely making sacrifices to them to bring rain and the end of the famine. But not David. He continues to turn to God, he prays on behalf of the people – “Let the light of your face shine on us” (v6) – for God to draw close and to end their distress. However, when all is said and done, David trusts God and can lie down to sleep trusting that God will look after his life.

Even though we are thousands of years apart, our 21st century culture is so like that of the people of Israel. Our neighbours turn to false gods and idols in their distress to find their answers. In the west, most of these idols are not physical idols but are things like money, power, sex and success, as well as possessions to find comfort, security and trust in. These might be different from the idols that Israel turned to, but they are no less hollow.

Trying to find comfort, security and trust in things that our world does is just as silly as making a god and worshiping it (read Isaiah 44). And yet, when our lives become difficult as Christians, we can so often fall back on these things. When things are hard, we look to idols to deliver us from distress. This is foolish.

We are more privileged than even David, because we don't have to plead for God's face to shine on us. Jesus is God's light (2 Corinthians 4:6) and he has made himself known to us. And has said he will never forsake us.

So, in distress, trust Jesus and know he holds your life, now and into eternity.

Pray: Ask God to show you what (or who) it is you turn to under pressure before you turn to him. Ask for his forgiveness. Give thanks for the riches of his promises to us and the blessings of his presence with us and ask for strength to make the right choices.

The Weight of Our Words

Read Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

This section of Ecclesiastes is concerned with words, in particular listening to God's words and watching for what we do with our words before God.

1. There are a bunch of instructions given by the teacher for his audience to follow. What are they? (vv1-2, v4, v6)
2. These instructions are largely to do with words. What's his explanation for these instructions? Note the "for" in ESV, especially in v2.
3. In short, the passage tells us to be careful with our words. It's better to listen when we draw near to God than to multiply words like fools. In fact, the New Testament has Jesus telling us not to swear, but let our yes be yes and no be no (Matthew 5:33-37). What vows have you made? How can you be keeping them today? Or if you haven't made an, what should be your attitude to making future vows?

Reflect: Think about the vows you have made before God (e.g. marriage, baptism) and the 'yes'es and 'no's you have said.

Pray: Confess before God the places in which you have fallen short and ask him for the faithfulness of Christ to live out your vows and words (2 Corinthians 1:18-20).

The Futility of Loving Money

Read Ecclesiastes 5:10–20

If you love money, you will never have enough. If you love wealth, you will never be satisfied with your returns. It is futile because loving money is like trying to fill up a bottomless pit. It is like trying to quench an insatiable thirst. You simply “will never be satisfied” (v10).

Rockefeller, widely considered the wealthiest American of all time was once asked, “How much money is enough?” What is the answer for you?

Pause for a second and think of an answer. How much money is enough for you?

Rockefeller’s answer was: “Just a little bit more.”

Isn’t it true that often when we think of our ideal salary and bank balance, we have the same answer as Rockefeller, “just a little bit more.” We love money and the things it can give us: control, status, security, comfort and enjoyment.

God is giving us this wisdom today – if we love money, we will never be satisfied. It is futile.

We are limited in what we can enjoy as individuals (v11), and this lifestyle of wealth can lead to insomnia (v12). You can hoard wealth to your own misery (v13a) and lose it easily, it grows wings and fly away (v13b). Naked we come into the world and naked we will go (v16). A person who loves money will never be satisfied. We see in v19 that what we actually enjoy are the gifts from God which change our perspective on what possessions mean.

In fact, 1 Timothy 6:9 warns us that those who desire to be rich stumble into temptation and get trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin. But instead, godliness with contentment is great gain. May God deliver us from a love of money and help us to be godly and content.

Pray: Proverbs 30:7–9.

Supplying Needs

Read Philippians 4:14–18

Do you know the joy of being at the receiving end of the generosity of other Christians? Or of being able to give support to a brother or sister in Christ who is in need?

In these few verses we have a beautiful picture of how generous giving can bring blessing and confirm our bond as a family in Christ.

Again, Paul is clear not to sound demanding, he is simply grateful to them for their practical expression of love and support. You can imagine his joy in knowing this church was mature and thoughtful enough to want to encourage him with practical support.

Paul delights in their offering, claiming he now has “everything” and “plenty.” More importantly, his excited praise shows that he sees this not just as a gift to him, but as evidence of their devotion to God – “fragrant offering, acceptable sacrifice, very pleasing to God.”

He recognises that God delights in this evidence of the church, as a body, supporting each other through difficult times.

Sometimes we feel overwhelmed by needs and demands of our finances. Paul reminds us here that giving generously (or receiving the generous gifts of others) is not just an integral part of our Christian lives, but brings in itself great blessing as we live out the reality of being part of the body of Christ, bearing each other’s burdens and building each other up.

Reflect: Is there anyone on your heart who needs your help? Is there anyone who has supported you, who you need to thank?

Pray: Ask God for opportunities to participate in giving and receiving support.

Glory and Grace

Read Philippians 4:19–23

How do you end your letters (emails or texts)?

1. Unpack v19. How does each phrase show us Paul's understanding of God's faithfulness and abundant provision?
 - my God
 - will meet all your needs
 - according to his glorious riches
 - in Christ Jesus
2. Apart from reaffirming their "partnership in the gospel" by sending greetings from "all the saints," Paul ends this letter with two prayers: v20 and v23. How would these two prayers encourage and reassure the Philippians?
3. Thinking back over Philippians, what have you found most encouraging, reassuring or even challenging?

Do: Choose a verse (or two) from Philippians to memorise. Share it and the reason you chose to memorise it with a Christian friend today.

Introduction to Colossians

Context

Colossae was a relatively insignificant city in the kingdom of Phrygia (located in modern day Turkey). It was one of a group of three cities in the Lycus valley, the two larger cities being Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Although it appears that Paul had not visited Colossae, they had heard the gospel through Epaphras and met in Philemon's house. Both men were converted through Paul's ministry. We know that the letter to the Colossians was delivered along with the letter to Philemon, both letters written for the purpose of being read aloud to the church.

Message

The letter appears to have been written specifically to combat the temptation to *add* to the gospel. The heresies addressed are not outrightly named but possibly included the worship of angels, adherence to traditional Jewish customs and, also, the idea of there being hidden mysteries that only the initiated could access.

Paul knows how hard it is to be a Christian, hence he exhorts them to hold firm to central truths in Christ as an anchor in an ever-changing, fretful world. Truth is a key theme in this book, namely a truth that was once a mystery that is now revealed to Jews and Gentiles, for us to share now in the 21st century. The central truth is the supremacy of Christ and his completed act of redemption and reconciliation. Therefore, Paul calls the Colossian Christians – and us – to put to death our “old selves” and, having been “raised with Christ,” to “set our minds on things above,” living as God’s chosen people, “wholly and dearly loved.”

Prayerful Thankfulness for Our Partners in the Gospel

Read Colossians 1:1-8

Sometimes in our individual struggles, it can be easy to lose sight of the fact that we belong to a wider, growing family in the gospel. Paul's letter is overflowing with thankfulness and affection for his partners in Christ.

1. What is Paul thankful for? (v4)
2. Paul talks about "faith and love" springing from the message of "hope stored up for you in heaven" (vv4-5). How does the certainty of our hope help us love God's people?
3. Paul is grateful that the Colossians – having heard the gospel from Epaphras – have continued to grow and bear fruit (vv6-8). Think of who you first heard the gospel from or an influential figure in your Christian faith. Think of how they have helped you. How might you emulate that in your interactions with others?

Reflect: Think of a Christian brother or sister who is close to your heart. Think of how they have encouraged you. Give thanks for them and pray for their continued growth in the gospel.

OR

Go onto the St Paul's website and find the page on missionary partners. Pray for one of our missionary partners and their continued fruitfulness in the gospel.



Prayer for Christian Growth

Read Colossians 1:9-14

Have you ever felt really excited about getting to know someone?

Knowledge strengthens relationships, helping you grow close and love others better. In v9, Paul's writing overflows with earnestness that the Colossians might know God's will more. This is a continued and active process. Paul stresses that he wants the Colossians to continue "growing in the knowledge of God" (v10) and that this is through the work of the Holy Spirit (v9). God will "fill" them "with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding." Paul's passion for the Colossians to grow in their knowledge of God is so great that "since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you" (v9). This is a remarkable encouragement for us to draw near to God and continue to know him better. Knowing God's will, what he wants, deeply impacts how we live and enables us to live lives "worthy of the Lord," bearing fruit in every good work (v10), persevering in the gospel (v11) and helping us be joyful in thanksgiving (v12).

In the book of Colossians, you will also notice that Paul continually brings us back to the gospel truth since he knows it is foundational to everything. God the Father, in his great love, has sent his son Jesus to rescue us from our sin. Not only that, but we are also brought into his kingdom and are to share in Jesus' inheritance (vv12-14). The Holy Spirit helps us grow in our understanding of this truth as it transforms every aspect of our lives (v9). What an amazing triune God we are privileged to know!

Pray: The Bible is God's living and active Word, it is how we can know God' will. Pray for growth in the discipline of not only reading God's Word regularly, but putting his will into practice so that you may "live a life worthy of the Lord."

God's Presence

Read Psalm 5

Think of a time when you have longed for – or been blessed by – the reassurance of God's presence with you.

David longs for all to take refuge in God's presence as he approaches God in the tabernacle. In v7 he approaches God in his house with great reverence and fear, bowing low in humility before him. And because of the sacrifice he would have made in the temple and the love God has for him (God's "great mercy"), he is welcomed into God's presence.

The arrogant and wicked however, cannot dwell with God (v4) or even be in God's presence (v5). They are wicked in their thoughts, words and deeds (v9) and are cast out of God's presence. Knowing our own sinfulness, these verses are confronting. Romans 3:9-20 tells us that all humanity is wicked. It quotes v9 to describe us all, meaning that we all cannot stand in God's presence. We all should rightly be cast out.

Jesus said just as much, "no one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). On our own there is no way to the Father, but through Jesus, we can be brought in. He, like David, came into God's presence bringing a sacrifice and bowed low in humility. Not for himself, but for the wicked. He brought the sacrifice of his own blood (Hebrews 10:19) and humbled himself to the grave (Philippians 2:8), paying the price for the wicked to be brought into God's presence. When he died, the curtain in the temple that separated God from the wicked was torn in two (Mathew 27:51).

All who call Jesus Saviour and Lord are now welcome in God's presence. So, although we were one of "the wicked," now, as his redeemed children, we can be reassured of God's presence with us always, and we can praise him for his blessings to us.

"But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you."
(Psalm 5:11)

Pray: Ask God to help you to trust in His steadfast love and might today. Thank Him for the protection He spreads over you.

The Goodness of Remembering Death

Read Ecclesiastes 7:1–4

If you have attended funerals before, what strikes you about them?

1. List out the comparisons of vv1–2. What is “better” than what?
2. Your name is your reputation that flows from your character and actions (Nehemiah 9:10). The teacher is saying that a good name coming from your inner character is better than perfume that is coming from your outer garment. Reflect on your circles (work, family, studies, church) – what would people say about your character?
3. This passage says wise people should allow themselves to be reminded by mourning and sadness that we are destined to die (v2). Recognising our temporary stay on this earth before heaven, what big decisions have you made recently? Are they made in light of your death and eternity (vv2–4)?

Pray: Use your reflections from question 3 and the changes you want to make under God. Let Psalm 90 guide your prayer and thinking, particularly v12: “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

Holding Onto Two Things at Once

Read Ecclesiastes 7:15–18

This is a tricky part of Scripture since vv16–17 seems to say not to be too righteous or wicked. So, is the teacher advocating for a “sin moderately” position? Is he telling us to choose “the path of least resistance” in our lives? This doesn’t seem to square with him telling us to fear God throughout this book, even in v18 (cf. 5:7, 12:13).

As usual, context is our best friend when it comes to reading Scripture. vv16–17 are juxtaposing the truth of v15: the righteous can perish in their righteousness and the wicked can keep on living to an old age. The teacher observes that being righteous or wicked doesn’t necessarily cause you to be destroyed or not. The teacher is likely stating vv16–17 right after this to compare truths.

The point he is trying to make is that when we see “everything” (v15 – ESV) we can’t seem to link a person’s fortune and fate directly to their relationship with God, as much as we may want to say being righteous or wicked directly leads to corresponding long or short lives (vv16–17). Ultimately, we need to hold onto both sets of truths or extremes (v18) and fear God.

This section of Ecclesiastes warns us against being too reluctant or too hasty to link our fate with our sin or righteousness. When we suffer, we can often wonder why. It is easy to see it simply as a result of something within us. This section helpfully guards us against either extreme. It encourages us to fear God and hold on to the fact that we can’t see through it all. It would be worth reflecting, w

Reflect: When do you seem to use your sin or righteousness to justify what’s happening to you? How much of that is helpful or unhelpful? Reflect on what fearing God looks like for you right now.

Pray: Ask for God’s help to be someone who, above all, and in all circumstances, fears God.

The Beginning and the End

Before you read the passage today, spend a minute formulating a one to two sentence summary of who Jesus is and what he means to you.

Read Colossians 1:15–20

In contemporary culture, we often talk about Jesus as one's "personal Saviour." While it is true, it can be easy to reduce Jesus to the role of a helper who fulfils a particular need in our day-to-day lives. In Colossians 1:15-20, we see that Jesus is not "just" a saviour but the reason for and ruler of all creation.

1. Read through the passage and highlight the different "roles" or "descriptions" of Jesus.
2. v18 reads "so that in everything he might have the supremacy." What do you think this means? How do the descriptors leading up to this verse give weight to this claim of "supremacy"?
3. Go back to the summary of who Jesus is that you wrote before reading the passage. After reading the passage, has your answer changed? If so, in what way?

Pray: Ask God to continue to convict your heart to see the glory and beauty of Christ. Pray that you will conduct your life in such a way that reflects and is ready to share Jesus' supremacy.

A Building is Only as Good as its Foundation

Read Colossians 1:21–23

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, you might have noticed that Paul keeps repeating the message of the gospel in the book of Colossians. Why is that?

Paul knows that the Colossians know the gospel (v23). But Paul also knows how central the truth of the gospel is throughout our whole Christian journey. He repeats the message to emphasise that we need to hold onto this truth as the foundation for all of life.

The gospel is a truth worth holding onto. Paul reminds us of how dire the circumstances were before we knew God. We were alienated from Him, cut off from the source of all life and goodness. This alienation ran so deep that our minds – our innermost attitudes and thoughts – were in enmity to God, causing us to act in opposition to him with “evil behaviour” (v21).

This is a stark contrast to v22. We have been “reconciled” to God by the work of “Christ’s physical body” on the cross. The idea of “present you” in v22 is both terrifying and exhilarating. Just imagine standing before the judgement throne of the creator and sustainer of the universe. In Christ, we are found to be holy and blameless. Notice this good news is paired with a warning: “if” we continue rooted in the faith. Paul reminds us that there is a lot at stake here and to not deviate from the truth.

In a world full of temptations and distractions, it is easy to compartmentalise the gospel into something we think about on Sundays. Paul reminds us that the gospel is not a truth you engage with once and “move on.” It is the very foundation of the Christian life.

Reflect: What foundational truths have you built your life on today? Where do you think those truths are leading you today, tomorrow and in ten years’ time?

Pray: That you will stay firmly rooted in the gospel through all time.

The Great Mystery

Read Colossians 1:24–29

What do you think it means for us today to struggle for the gospel?

1. The book of Colossians talks a lot about the idea of a “glorious” mystery, one that has been “hidden for ages and generations but is now disclosed to the Lord’s people” (v26). What is this great mystery that Paul has been commissioned to proclaim (v27)?
2. What do you think it means that it was once hidden and is now revealed (vv26-27)? You may also want to look at Ephesians 3:3-6.
3. We know from Colossians 4:18 that Paul is writing this book whilst in prison. What motivates him so that he can both “rejoice” (v24) in his suffering and “strenuously contend” (v29) for the church to know this mystery?

Reflect: Think of a recent challenging situation you had for the sake of the gospel. How did it make you feel? Remember that as different emotions come and go, we will find true joy in Christ, even in the midst of suffering.

How (Not) to Win Friends and Influence People

Read Colossians 2:1-5

Do you ever wish you had some special knowledge or insight that would give you deeper understanding and help you make major life decisions?

If only we had the insider tips, we could choose the best option and achieve more success, happiness and wealth. This may be what you think of as wisdom. There certainly is an abundance of ideas out there on how to invest your money, raise your children and choose the right career path.

In Colossians 2:1-5, Paul raises a radical idea: in Christ, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (v3). It is in Christ that all the wisdom of the universe is hidden, in his character, his person, his Lordship, his gospel and his truth (you might remember we touched on this in Colossians 1:15-20). This is a profound idea that is an inexhaustible trove of wisdom.

Notice what Paul's goal is, that we may be "encouraged in heart and united in love" (v2). That is, to be strengthened in our faith and in our love for one another. This is a rebuke not to use wisdom to "get ahead" of others, but rather, to love and build up one another.

It appears that there were those in the church at Colossi who claimed to have special "knowledge," who were adding a list of man-made rules to the true gospel or attempting to "disqualify" some believers. This false "wisdom," though it may have sounded plausible, was denying the free gift of salvation found in Christ. It was divisive and discouraging.

Pray: That we will seek wisdom deeply in Christ and Christ alone. Pray that we will use these "treasures of wisdom and knowledge" to grow in love and unity as a church.

Mercy!

Read Psalm 6

Has there ever been a time when you were overwhelmed with suffering? How did you respond?

This psalm is an all-out plea for God's mercy. In this psalm, David believes he is suffering because God is punishing him (v1). He is in such distress that his pillow is wet from his tears (v6) every night. He is overwhelmed with sorrow because of the foes that he believes God has sent up against him (v7). He believes God has handed him over to death (v5), so, he flings himself onto God's steadfast love to deliver him (v4).

This kind of love is God's covenant love – his love through the promises he makes to his people (Psalm 145:13). God cannot lie and always keeps his promises. This is what David is appealing to. God has promised that he will protect David as God's anointed king and even put one of his sons on the throne. So, David is pleading with God with great sorrow to keep his promises to him.

But then in v8, there is a change in tone from David. He warns his foes because he realises that God has heard his sorrow. He then even more resolutely declares in v9:

*The Lord has heard my cry for mercy;
the Lord accepts my prayer.*

God has kept his promise to David and delivered him.

Reflect: Are there times in your life when you feel such great sorrow that you cry yourself to sleep each night? Such anguish that you feel like God is against you? From David's example and from our Lord Jesus's example, we should throw ourselves onto God's steadfast love, onto his promise to us in Jesus. While God might not take away all sorrow in this life, he will never leave you or forsake you, but will comfort you and deliver you into eternal life.

See Romans 8:38-39.

Pray: For anyone you know who is currently overwhelmed by sorrow or suffering. Pray that they will be reassured of the Lord's unfailing love and deliverance.

The Same Destiny For All

Read Ecclesiastes 9:1-6

What matters in life? The teacher says: being alive. A living dog is better than a dead lion.

1. List out the 'goodies' and the 'baddies' given in v2.
2. The destiny of death overtakes all of those above, regardless of whether you are the 'goodie' or the 'baddie' (even though we are warned about vows in 5:4-5 – such is the enigmatic nature of Ecclesiastes!). So, what does the teacher say matters and why (vv4-6)?
3. Consider Paul's rebuke to those who deny the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:12-19).
v14 "if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith."
v19 "if only for this life we have hope in Christ we are to be pitied more than all men."
Critically, the resurrection means life has the last word for those in Christ, now and into eternity. How can you live in wisdom today by taking to mind both the reality of vv5-6 and the resurrection that awaits you?

Pray: Use your reflections from question 3. If you want more inspiration, consider praying from Psalm 73: "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

The Value of Everyday Living

Read Ecclesiastes 9:7-10

What value do you put on the everyday things of life? Too much or too little?

Sandwiched between sections on the inevitability of death for all, the teacher commands and extols the value of enjoying the 'mundane' of everyday life. He commands eating and drinking with joy, and the wearing of white robes and oiling of one's head (associated with celebrating with joy and gladness – Psalm 23:5, Isaiah 61:3). He commands enjoying life with one's spouse and working with all our might. So, does focusing on the everyday give meaning to our lives?

Well, that's not all of what the teacher is saying. These commands are still tinged with a sense of futility – that we are enjoying a meaningless life in meaningless days (v9). We work with all our might in view of death (v10) and, for the teacher, the Old Testament view of the afterlife in Sheol where it is the sleep of the dead. So, we are asking: what's the point? This is all part of the vexation of Ecclesiastes, the teacher doesn't provide us with a final solution, yet this doesn't mean his advice should be ignored.

The teacher is tapping into the reality that God gifts us with the good things he has created. 1 Timothy 4:4 says "For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer." There is enjoyment that God provides through the grace of food and drink and through our clothing and relationships. These things ought to be received with thanksgiving. There are two warnings for us here: we can swing to seeing these things as the answer to the 'vapour' nature of life by grabbing the most toys before we die and 'living it up.' We can also swing the other way to see that nothing matters: thinking we are above routines, above the gifts of creation because, after all, we are all going to die. As such, we can reject the giftedness of the mundane.

Reflect: Do you use and chase food/drink/clothing/work/relationships in order to solve the vanity of life? Or is it more of a case that you have neglected these good things God has created to be received with thanksgiving?

Pray: Ask God to enlighten you to help you see how you use and think of the things he gives you.

Captivity of the Mind

Read Colossians 2:6–12

We have been thinking through how truth matters – specifically the truth about who Jesus is and his work of reconciliation on the cross. In our passage today, Paul warns against alternative “truths” that may sound good and believable (Colossians 2:4) but are ultimately deceptive.

1. Why do you think Paul uses the word “captive” in v8? What does this remind you of?
2. Despite the real and serious dangers posed by “hollow and deceptive philosophy,” Paul is quick to point us back to key truths in vv9-12. This is a reminder that the best “antidote” to being deceived is to continue to look deeply to Christ for truth and wisdom. What do you think Paul means by “in Christ you have been brought to fullness” (v10)? How does this contrast to the “hollow philosophy” in v8?
3. How does vv11-12 cement the idea of belonging to Christ? How does this compare to the idea of captivity in v8?

Reflect: Think through the last big decision you made. What kind of influences swayed your decision making? Did those influences encourage or discourage you from relying on Christ?

Pray: That you might not be deceived by hollow and deceptive philosophy that relies on human tradition and the basic principles of this world. Pray that you might rely on Christ alone.

The Heart of the Matter

Read Colossians 2:13-19

Have you ever felt you have had to “prove” your sincerity as a Christian by following particular church customs or traditions? Have you judged others who have not “done” the Christian life the way you do?

The Gentile Christians in first century AD would likely have felt pressure from some of the Jewish Christians to live in a certain way to prove their faith.

In Colossians 2:13-19, Paul reminds us that the gospel gives us freedom through truth. We were once dead in sin (v13) and bound for condemnation under God (v14). This judgement was cancelled with Jesus’ death, having been nailed to the cross by the authorities of the day (v14). Jesus’ subsequent resurrection brings not only personal salvation for those who believe, but is also a public declaration that Jesus is Lord over all earthly powers and authorities (v15). Paul reminds us that salvation is found in Christ, not in any earthly traditions or practices.

Paul also reminds us of a truth that he has explained earlier in Colossians 1:26-27. The Jewish laws in the Old Testament were created to point us to Christ (v17). To rely on anyone or anything outside of Christ misses the point and puts us in danger of disconnecting ourselves from Christ (v19) and practising false humility (v18). To the first century Christians, some may have felt they were more spiritual by worshipping angels (v18), but what do you think our struggles are today? Do you find yourself so focused on what you should be doing, and on the judgement of others, that you forget to rely on God’s grace?

Pray: That as a church, we might focus on encouraging one another to trust in Christ, rather than judging on outward appearances.

True Worship

Read Colossians 2:20–23

Most Christians know that rules that tell us what we “should” do can’t “save” us, but sometimes, a rules-based way of living can impact more subtly on our lives.

Do you remember the last time you were guilt-tripped by someone telling you what you “should” be doing? It might be an effective way of changing behaviour, but it fails to produce a true change of heart. Do you find yourself validating your sense of godliness according to how well you’re serving at church? Do you find yourself judging others based on what they eat, how neat and “presentable” they look at church, or how much they’re giving in offertory?

1. What reasons does Paul give in v20 and v22 as to why we shouldn’t follow worldly rules?
2. What gives these rules an appearance of wisdom (v23)?
3. Are there any rules that you are relying on to validate your sense of godliness? Reflect on and repent of this “false wisdom.” Ask God to remind you that you are saved by grace alone!

Pray: For yourself and any Christian friend you know who is tempted to judge themselves or others by the “human commands and teachings” of other Christians. “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness.” (Colossians 2:6)

Reality Check

Read Colossians 3:1-7

In *The Matrix*, the main character, Neo, is faced with a difficult choice: to seek the truth, knowing he is to face a tough reality, or stay blissfully unaware in a simulation of reality. Being a Christian can also feel like we are stuck between two versions of reality.

Paul reminds us that we have died with Christ (v3) and have also been raised with him into heaven (v1). That is, our spiritual death and resurrection is in the past tense; it happened when Jesus died and rose again almost two thousand years ago. Our current spiritual reality is hidden with Christ in heaven (v3). Our future spiritual reality is to appear with Christ in glory (v4).

In the meantime, we live in a physical reality where it can be so tempting to return to our old ways of living. vv5-6 serve as a strong warning against going back, “put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature.” God’s judgement is imminent (v6) and our old ways of living are incompatible with our spiritual reality in Christ.

We need to keep reminding ourselves that we have been raised with Christ and that our true reality is with him. So then, we are encouraged to “set our minds on things above.” This does not mean that we disengage from life in this world, but rather, we live a radically different life. As 1 Peter 2:11-12 puts it, we are “aliens and strangers” here, and we are exhorted to “live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”

Reflect: How might you set your hearts and minds on “things above”? How does this certainty regarding what God is doing in you now, and will do in the future, affect the way you live now?

False Accusations

Read Psalm 7

Have you ever been falsely accused?

You may not have ended up in court to defend your innocence, but perhaps you've been the object of untrue gossip; perhaps some falsehood about you started circulating and it impacted the way people related to you. It's a horrible feeling. Any defense you offer can seem like defensiveness and end up leading more people to believe that the slander is true. This psalm shows us a better way than self-defense.

David, pursued by enemies because of some false report (vv2-5), turns to God for refuge (v1). The court of human opinion makes mistakes; the court of the righteous God never does. God probes hearts and minds, finding the truth without fail, for no evidence can be hidden from him. God is righteous, incorruptible and unbribable, handing down the wrath that the wicked deserve. Rather than defend himself, or seek revenge against his enemies, David entrusts himself to the God who judges justly.

Jesus, of whom David is but a shadow, adopted the same attitude: "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly." (1 Peter 2:23).

When the wicked pursue you, when they gossip about you or slander you, or when the Evil One who prowls around like a lion accuses you, may you find refuge in God, the righteous judge.

Pray: Spend some time praising God for his righteousness. Bring any current situations of "false accusations" to him.

Life: Vending Machine or Roulette?

Read Ecclesiastes 9:11-12

What have you seen of people getting what they deserve? Or what they don't deserve?

1. Again, the teacher gives us his observation – what he has ‘seen.’ Do you think vv1-2 reflects what you have ‘seen’ in this world? Why/why not?

2. This passage critiques the phrase, ‘You get what you deserve,’ or as put by Nutri-Grain, “You only get out what you put in.’ This passage shows that sometimes putting in the right inputs does not result in the right outputs. Life can work less like a vending machine and more like a roulette. The end of v11 claims that “time and chance happen to them all.” What difference does having this perspective make for you in your judgement of others?

3. v12 talks about how we are ensnared in this evil time, with the Fall overshadowing life here on earth (Genesis 3:19b). How can we remind ourselves to trust and serve our Father even when life seems unpredictable or the times seem “evil”?
 - 2 Peter 4:19 may be helpful: “So then those who suffer according to God’s will, should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.”
 - Or the reminder in Ephesians 6:13-18 that we need the full armour of God to resist evil.

Naturally we are afraid of losing control – let the Lord’s prayer guide you today.

Pray: Matthew 6:9-13

The Example of a City

Read Ecclesiastes 9:13–18

Read Proverbs 17:27b, 24:5–6

What is the value to being wise?

Perhaps we might answer that the value of wisdom is that it gives us an easier ride in life. Perhaps we might be inclined to think that wisdom enables us to live in grain with reality and so it means we will make less mistakes and have more ‘wins.’ It certainly seems that in Proverbs 24:5 we are told that the wise prevail through great power and victory is won through having many advisers (24:6) – you win through having many providers of wisdom!

But in this section of Ecclesiastes, we are given another example, of a poor but wise man who delivers a city under siege through his wisdom but gains no particular reward for it. He is not remembered, in fact, he is later despised and ignored (v16). Again, Ecclesiastes confounds our expectation of a life where inputs match outputs, where acts correspond with consequences, where we reap what we sow. Even vv17-18 deals with the power of wisdom but ends with the sting of how this can be confounded by just one sinner.

This section forces us to look again at this world and what actually happens in it, and wrestle with the reality that we can't make sense of why things are the way they are sometimes. We know God is sovereign, but that doesn't mean we have all the answers. It's noteworthy that the teacher doesn't charge God with evil or wrongdoing, he doesn't say there is no value to wisdom, but he is clearly perplexed. This shows us that trusting in God doesn't mean we never feel perplexed by the contradictions of life. You may very well have been recognised to be wise before, but now the same people despise and ignore you – life is vexing! It's okay and normal to be confounded. So we come back to the need to fear God and to live in humility before him.

Pray: Let Job's response in Job 42:1-6 inspire your prayer today, acknowledging that God can "do all things" but that sometimes we "do not understand." Ask God to help you show grace to others and not become like Job's friends.

Unity Through Love

Read Colossians 3:8-11

“You used to walk in these ways in the life you once lived. But now...”

What changes have you seen in your own life, since you became a Christian?

As we look through the rest of chapter 3, keep in mind that all these instructions flow from what we read a little while back in Colossians 3:1-7.

1. What kind of behaviours does Paul tell the Colossians is related to the “old self” and its practices (vv8-9)?
2. What kind of mindset do you think the “old self” has? For example, what does the “old self” think about itself and other people? What do you think “put on the new self” (v10) means?
3. How do you think the Christians in first century AD would have felt when they first heard v11 read aloud? Can you think of any modern-day class divisions or barriers between Christians in our context? How might we seek unity despite our differences?

Reflect: Think through, honestly, how your behaviour towards others has been in the last week. This may range from things you have done to your attitude toward others. Ask for forgiveness for self-serving behaviour and pray that you would learn to love others and seek unity better.

Living as God's People

Read Colossians 3:12-14

What “clothes” does your Christian community wear? Could these verses describe the way you relate to each other?

In Colossians 3:12-14, Paul expands on what it means to live in God’s reality (see 3:1-7). Of all the things Paul could choose to focus on, it is on the importance of love. Why is this? Paul reminds us in v12 that God loved us first. He foreknew us as his “chosen people” and determined to show us favour as his “dearly loved” children, forgiving us, even when we were his enemies (v13). Love is at the core of God’s character. Therefore, we should also seek to put love as our core business.

Notice what is special about love, as explained by Paul. What do the qualities of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience have in common? Firstly, it appears that love does not have much to do with how it makes one feel, as Hollywood movies would have you believe. Secondly, as we will find out in tomorrow’s study (3:15-17), love brings about unity in God’s people (v14) because it sets aside one’s sense of importance and one’s desires, looking out for the best interest of others. As imperfect people, we will inevitably let each other down at some point. Love helps us forgive one another (v13), as it is the glue that “binds them all together in unity” (v14).

Reflect: What do you think it would look like to “clothe yourself” with love? What might that look like in your context and in your relationships at home, work and beyond?

Church Matters

Read Colossians 3:15-17

What does peace look like in a church?

Over the last couple of days, we have been reading about how to act towards one another. Today, we want to think through what it looks like within a church context.

1. What do you think “called to peace” means? How is peace entwined with unity and thankfulness?
2. What kind of traits does Paul advocate as markers of a healthy congregation of Christians? See Colossians 2:5 as well.
3. How does v17 impact on how you act, both inside and outside of a church context? Specifically think through how it might impact your life outside of Sunday.

Reflect: What are some ways you might encourage others in the spirit of v16 in your personal context? Pray for opportunities to do these things.

Family Relationships

Read Colossians 3:18-21

What do loving relationships look like in your family?

Over the last few days, we have been looking at what it means to love others in different contexts. Today, we will be looking at love, in a family context, in light of the fact that we have been spiritually reborn in Christ (Colossians 3:1-4). Those of us who lived with others during lockdown can appreciate that it can often be the hardest to love those closest to you. Living in close quarters can provoke, exasperate, and test patience. Conflict, in various forms, is inevitable. The passage today gives us principles on how to love others in our family within the different roles you might occupy throughout your life. The other thing to note is that one of the reasons why Paul is writing to the Colossians is to promote discipline (Colossians 2:5), which can also be translated as order. Hence Paul's goal here is to encourage loving and orderly families.

On a surface-level reading, order may seem opposed to love. Demanding order can be seen as oppressive. However, as we have read earlier in Colossians 3:12, love should be defined by compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. There is, therefore, no place for selfish behaviour that demands satisfaction from others. Rather, order should be motivated by love, as we put aside our felt entitlements, needs and desires for the good of others within our various roles in the family.

Reflect: Which role, if any, in the passage do you identify with? How can you apply the command given here in your context?

Pray: That you might learn to love your family better within your specific role and context.

How Majestic is Your Name

Read Psalm 8

Think of a time when you have looked into the star-filled night sky, or across a vast ocean or mountain range, and felt your own insignificance and the grandeur of creation.

1. How does this psalm point us to the majesty of God?
2. What does this psalm teach you about God's mercy to humans?
3. How can you be a good steward of God's world today, ruling over it with care and concern?

Pray along with this
song version of Psalm 8
by Shane and Shane.



Remember Your Creator

Read Ecclesiastes 12:1-8

What are three words you associate with ageing?

1. This passage is cut into three sections with a “before” which kicks off each section (v1b, vv2-5, vv6-7). Re-read these sections. What is the impact of these images? How do you feel?
2. The only instruction we are given is to “remember” our creator. Read Deuteronomy 8:11-20, what may cause us to forget or remember our creator and redeemer?
3. We are encouraged to remember our creator considering our march towards eventual death. This section then closes the whole book (with the preacher as the narrator), repeating the phrase he starts the book with (1:2, 12:8). “Everything is meaningless.” Given that Jesus has defeated death but we are still awaiting his return, how do you think this overarching statement, “everything is meaningless,” can help you live with wisdom today?

Pray: That although your days may be limited you can “always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.” (1Corinthians 15:58)

The Bottom Line

Read Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

Ecclesiastes ends with the narrator, not the teacher speaking. This narrator is trying to help us grasp 'the bottom line' of this book: fear God and keep his commandments.

The narrator first highlights the wisdom of the teacher – this teacher is a public figure (v9). The teacher also works with intentionality. Every word has been thought through, none of them an accident. Indeed, the nature of what is written in Ecclesiastes has been evaluated and arranged with a desire for delightful words and truthful sayings (v10). It's meant to leave us thinking, what a great and wonderful part of Scripture!

Surely that must mean we would listen to what the teacher says. But the narrator warns us, just because the words are written with a desire for delight and truth doesn't mean it will go down easy. In fact, the words of Ecclesiastes will be like a goad; a prod for cattle sharply spurring us on. We will feel these words poking us. I am sure that has been the case as you wrestled with this book over the past nine weeks.

We might react by wanting to change what we hear because they are difficult words. However, the narrator warns us that these sayings are like embedded nails, they are immovable (v11). We don't want to think about death, so the easiest thing to do is the dodge the goad. But the truth is, like an embedded nail, we can't break the truth, when we try, we only end up breaking ourselves. We need to recognise that these words are given by the one shepherd, our God, who wants what is good for us (v11). After all that is said and done, in all the vexation of life and even the vexation in trying to understand all that is in this book, what matters is fearing God and keeping his commandments. God is our judge and there is nothing hidden from his sight (v14).

So how will we respond to the goad? Will we flinch and seek to escape it, or live in reality and gain wisdom? Will you fear God above all else, all circumstances and all people in your life? Will you listen and do his will above your own? It's clear from Ecclesiastes that we can't understand it all, but God is leaving us with this challenge: will you fear me?

Reflect: How you are going at fearing God and keeping his commandments?

Pray: Confess your sin and ask for his forgiveness and help.

Hierarchical Relationships at Work

Read Colossians 3:22–4:1

What is your work situation? Do you identify more with “boss” or “employee? Maybe a bit of both?

Slavery has very negative connotations in modern times, and rightfully so. It can be easy to read this passage as one that condones slavery. As we read the passage today, it is in the context of the complex Roman system of slavery, where slaves were a widespread feature of society and their roles included accountants, doctors, household servants and soldiers. Roman slaves could sometimes own property and some were paid wages.

Paul has a lot to say on slavery in Colossians and beyond, but his primary preoccupation is the idea of spiritual slavery. That is why, regardless of status as “slave” or “slave master,” Paul urges both to remember it is the Lord Jesus who is their master (3:24, 4:1).

Although this passage is addressed to actual slaves and masters, we can still apply the principles to our own work situations.

1. What does 3:22-24 say about our work ethic as Christians?
2. Why does 4:1 charge those in a position of power to do what is “right and fair”? How does that impact on how we treat others under our care?

Pray: For those in positions of power, that they would use it for good. Pray for your personal context, that in everything you work to serve the Lord Jesus.

Prayerful Living

Read Colossians 4:2-6

The average human has about 50,000 thoughts a day. Prayer is important and simple enough to do. Yet how many of us find it hard to channel our thoughts into prayer or feel guilt when we don't do it enough? How many of those thoughts end up being fretful and distracted, as we think about what to eat, the next project coming up or conflict in our relationships?

Paul instructs us to “devote [ourselves] to prayer” (v2). This is a commitment to being prayerful. If we rely on our fickle whims, we will not drift into it naturally. In regards to the nature of our prayers, Paul states they should be “watchful and thankful.” “Watchful” expands on the idea of intentionality. We should be deliberate in setting aside the time to pray, turning our thoughts and worries towards communion with God, being careful not to fall into inertia or complacency. Our prayers should also be full of thankfulness in acknowledgment of God’s plentiful grace in all aspects of our lives.

Paul also encourages the Colossians to pray for him and his companions, that God might “open a door” – provide opportunities – to proclaim the gospel message “clearly” (vv3-4). This is a worthy goal we should pray for in our time and context, for ourselves and our own local and global gospel partners. This should be complemented with our own lives, as we seek to honour the truth in the way we live and speak, making “the most of every opportunity” to proclaim the gospel and to speak the truth with grace (v6).

Reflect: How will you implement prayerfulness into your daily routine? What are some practical ways to implement prayerfulness into your day-to-day thoughts as you study, work, parent or whatever it is you do in the week?

Stand Firm

Read Colossians 4:7-18

How do you encourage and affirm those you would call brothers and sisters in Christ?

We often skip over greetings in Paul's letters as a collection of seemingly random messages to his friends, but they provide a good summary of the letter in lived experience.

1. What does Paul commend Epaphras for in v12? What is their wish for the Colossians?
2. How does Paul encourage the Colossians to stand firm? (vv8-9, vv12-15)
3. What is Paul and his fellow workers' relationship like with the Colossians? (vv7-9, v12, v18)

Pray: That we would stand firm in the gospel. Pray for growth in the discipline of prayer and that, like Epaphras, we might be "always wrestling" in prayer.

A Special Case

Read Colossians 4:9

Optional: Read Philemon

Think about the way relationships can be completely altered when someone comes to Christ.

Deeply intertwined into the story of the book of Colossians is the book of Philemon. The church at Colossae met at the house of a businessman by the name of Philemon (vv1-2). We know that the letter to the Colossians was delivered along with the letter to Philemon (Colossians 4:7-8) and that both letters were written for the purpose of being read aloud to the church (v2). What kind of personal matters concerning Philemon did Paul believe the church should hear? We find out that it is regarding Onesimus, Philemon's runaway slave, who is accompanying Tychicus back to Colossae (Colossians 4:9).

Onesimus is described as formerly "useless" – having run away – but now "useful" to both Onesimus and Paul (v11), having been spiritually fathered by Paul in prison (v10) and now a dearly beloved and invaluable part of Paul's ministry (vv12-13). This would have been ironic to the hearers since the name Onesimus meant "useful". This would have also struck the hearers of the letter as a radical story of redemption that would have been both unconventional and controversial. Running away was a grave offence in Roman times. If a runaway slave were caught, they would be faced with severe consequences, even death.

But we see in v15 that God had a higher purpose. Onesimus' misdemeanour in the eyes of the Roman law resulted in him coming to know Christ. The redemption from slavery is both spiritual and physical, and Paul is appealing to Philemon to be reconciled to Onesimus as an equal brother under Christ (vv16-17).

Notice that Paul knows he has authority as an apostle of Christ to command Philemon to obey his instructions (v8, v19, v21). Yet Paul appeals to something even greater than obedience, a willing heart of love (v9, v14).

Reflect: How does today's passage impact the way you think of Colossians 3:15-4:1? You might choose to focus on church life, family relationships or the workplace.

The Lord Reigns Forever

Read Psalm 9

Does injustice in the world trouble you? Do you long for God to act on behalf of the oppressed?

We live in a world full of oppression. From “re-education camps,” to unrestrained violence against people groups, to generations-long systemic injustice. There are many in our world who are oppressed, afflicted, and needy. This is the daily reality for Christians in many countries, where our brothers and sisters find themselves thrown in prison, have their belongings seized, their property taken away from them, or suffering beatings and even death.

While this might not be your daily reality at this stage, it is useful to hear in the psalm the nature of God towards the oppressed: “The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble” (v9); “He who avenges blood remembers; he does not ignore the cries of the afflicted” (v12); “God will never forget the needy; the hope of the afflicted will never perish” (v18). Meanwhile, those who are perpetrating the oppression will certainly perish. Those who have forgotten God and mistreated other people whom God loves will themselves be forgotten.

On the one hand, for us living comfortably in Australia, the character of our God here makes us pause to reflect on whether we are complicit in any oppression in our lives (for example, see James 5:1-6).

On the other hand, this psalm gives us great cause to sing the praise of the Lord who is enthroned for judgement and judges the peoples with equity. In his name, one day, once and for all, all oppression will cease. If you ever do find yourself oppressed, afflicted, or needy, cry to the Lord who will hear you and remember you.

Pray: For those who are oppressed today, that they would turn to God for their help, and trust in him to carry them through their affliction into everlasting life. Pray for those who are oppressing others, that they would weep in repentance before the judge of the earth.

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