



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

## Know Your Role: The Instruction Manual for Ministry

Preeminent. Christ's Place in the World | Part 6

Tim Badal | January 18, 2015 | Colossians 1:24-29



Turn in your Bibles to the book of Colossians. We are currently in a series entitled, "Preeminent". It is a study of Paul's letter to a church in the city of Colossae, which was located in what is now modern-day Turkey. In this study, we have been learning that we serve a God and King Who is filled with majesty and glory. His Name is Jesus Christ. What makes Jesus magnificent and glorious? What makes Him preeminent? Christ created all things, claims all things and controls all things to the glory of His Name. Last week, we learned another reason for His preeminence: He has reconciled all things to Himself by His death, burial and resurrection. This week, we come to the question, "How does this preeminence affect me? What am I doing in light of everything that I've learned about Jesus and the central role that He plays in my salvation and redemption?"

Our text today is going to tell us the answer. Study after study has been done on the Christian faith. These studies show that people would be more engaged in their faith if they knew how to practically apply it and how their faith impacts their everyday lives. Paul says that this endeavor isn't easy. If you have come here for easy answers on walking a life of faith, there are none. It is difficult. Paul will use words like, "suffering," and "striving," and "anguish." However, when we seek God and pursue Him, we allow our faith to fire on all cylinders. Paul says that the difficult, and sometimes weary, walk will be the greatest thing that we could ever experience.

That is what we will look at today in Colossians 1:24-29. Here's what Paul says:

*Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.*

In our text today, Paul begins to transition from his introduction and his defense of Jesus Christ as the Preeminent One to the Colossians' situation in particular. He does this by sharing his current situation. In Colossians 1:24-29, we get a glimpse into the life of the Apostle Paul and his ministry. As we examine it, we see that his life is a life worth imitating. Within this text, Paul calls each of us to our God-given roles as followers of Jesus Christ, and he gives us a step-by-step instructional manual so that we might accomplish that calling.

This past Christmas my son Joshua, who loves Legos, was given the largest Lego set that he has ever received. The set was comprised of over 700 pieces that, when assembled, would form an impressive house – complete with lights and a grill and a tiny drumstick. It had all the bells and whistles. As we looked at the instructional manual, there were more than 200 distinct steps for assembling this Lego set. There were about a dozen different times when he would turn a page and his hands would go up in frustration. He'd say, "I'm done! There's no way I can do this!" But he stuck with it, with our encouragement, and he put the whole house together, even the little drumstick for the grill. How can a nine-year-old kid take 700 pieces of small, assorted Legos and form an impressive house? How can he do that? Well, the creators of the Lego set provided some help, knowing that young

children would never be able to do this on their own. With the Legos came that instructional manual, complete with pictures for putting each piece together, showing how the pieces would fit so that everything would be in the proper spot.

Our God in heaven is our Creator. He has given us an instructional manual. He's given us someone who has gone before us, putting it all together so that we can have an example to follow. That example was the Apostle Paul. When we look at God's instructional manual, the Bible, the Apostle Paul shows us what a life and ministry dedicated to God looks like. Many of us throw up our hands and say, "I don't know my place in this world! I don't know my role in the church. I don't know what God has put me on this earth to do or to accomplish." Paul says, "Follow me. Imitate me as I imitate Christ." In this passage, we are given that step-by-step manual. Here's the thing. It's not good enough to just know the steps; you have to do the hard work. You need perseverance and endurance. Your walk of faith is not that different from my son's Lego set. You can't say, "Paul got it right. That's great. Look at that structure that Paul has built. He's a master builder." No. We need to look at Paul's example and do the hard work. Endure and, even when you feel that you have come to a dead-end, roll up your sleeves and do the work of faith. When you accomplish what God has placed you on earth to do, there is no better place to be.

You should have seen my son's joy when he showed his mother the finished product. He was excited about his finished work. We asked him what he was going to do next. He said, "Well, the creator says I can make another house. So I'm going to tear it all apart and do it again." That's what God calls us to do each and every day. Once one project is done, begin working on another project. Always toil for the faith. How do we do that? Paul gives us an example in three parts. If you want to know your role and follow God's instructional manual for your lives, then you, like Paul, must:

## 1. Commit yourself to God's Calling

Colossians 1:24-25, "*Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known.*" Paul understood his role. In Colossians 1:25, his calling isn't connected to a program. It isn't connected to a particular ministry. It isn't because he got an answer from a spiritual gift assessment test (though those things can be helpful).

The thing we need to understand about our calling is that it, first and foremost, begins and ends with God. Many people have asked me, "What do you think, Pastor, is my calling in life? What do you think God has placed me upon this earth to do?" Many times with that question comes an expectation that I'm going to tell them their place in God's will is a specific "dot." You must be "right here." We put the cart before the horse when we do that. Your calling begins with an acknowledgement. Paul declares that God is in charge and that we must say to the Lord, "Wherever You lead, I will follow." That is a dangerous prayer. To say to the Lord, "I'll go where You want me to go," doesn't always mean staying where you are. Usually it means going to a place, whether across the street or across the world, that will pull you out of your comfort zone. This is what Paul prays. How do we know this?

In Colossians 1:25, Paul says, "*...I became a minister...*" That sounds pretty good. That sounds like something that would look good on a business card. "I'm Paul. I am a minister of God." That looks good on a nameplate, doesn't it? But we need to understand that, as we dig a little deeper, the word Paul uses is the Greek word, *diakonos*. It literally means servant or slave. This word in the New Testament was used to describe one who performed menial and mundane activities or tasks. A *diakonos* was one who waited on tables, who cleaned a house, who did household chores like laundry and picking up after others. It described a person who was insignificant and unknown. Such service would involve dependence and submission. It meant time constraints and limited freedom.

In Colossae, they were influenced by the Greek culture in which a *diakonos* was a degrading and dishonorable position. Remember, the Colossian church had been infiltrated by teachers who claimed that the highest calling for any person was to distinguish oneself through intellect. The goal of a person's life was to make oneself preeminent over all others. Paul says, "I have made myself a servant and I am called to follow Jesus Christ and do whatever He says, no matter how menial." Why would Paul do this? Why would the great, spectacular apostle lower himself to such a menial position and role? Paul recognized what we must also recognize. Our calling is:

### From God

Paul says that he is a servant or minister "*...according to the stewardship from God that was given to [him]...*" (Colossians 1:25). Paul was a servant. Did he deserve to be a servant? No. However, like Paul, we have been graced by God with an opportunity to serve our heavenly Master. How are we going to do this? The word "stewardship" tells us that our job is to manage the Kingdom work.

This calling wasn't generally given to everyone. God didn't say to everyone, "Be a minister of Jesus Christ," and Paul just signed up for it. God specifically gives Paul this calling to be a minister of the gospel. He says, "It was given to me as an individual on behalf of our Lord Jesus Christ to a unique group of people: the Colossian church." God has called each and every one of us. If you are a child of God, God has called you, not only to a relationship with His Son Jesus Christ, but also to use the unique gifts that God has given in order to serve the world around you as a steward. As we serve God, know that your calling isn't only from God, but it is also:

## For God

Paul was a prominent man who has endured an immense amount of suffering. He experienced anguish. He became a menial servant. He addresses the Colossians from this perspective. What inspired Paul to do this kind of thing? What will it take to make us, as self-important people, give up our own plans, our own desires, our own wants and expectations and dreams, to follow a God Whom we've never seen and live by a Book written a few thousand years ago? What would possess us to do such a thing? To lay down ourselves for the sake of this God Whom we say we serve?

The answer is in Colossians 1:21-23. Last week we learned that we are lost. We are in need of salvation. Apart from Someone coming on our behalf Who could fight the fight and win the battle that we were losing, we were heading to hell without hope. In Colossians 1:21-23, a Strong Man appeared: Jesus Christ. He is the Preeminent One. He comes and seeks and saves that which was lost. He does so through His death and by His blood on the cross of Calvary. We, who were without hope, can now have hope in the gospel. We can have a relationship with our Father in heaven. Because we've been, as the text says, reconciled from our sin and our death and our trespasses, being hostile in our minds (Colossians 1:21), to now having a relationship with God. We are presented holy and blameless before our Father in heaven, above reproach before Him. If that is what Christ has done, then shouldn't we respond to that sacrifice?

As we were driving to church this morning we heard a song on the radio about the grace of God. At the end it said, "All I need to say is, 'Thank You.'" I leaned over to my wife Amanda and said, "That's not what the Bible says." Yes, thank You is a part of it. Go on, singer! Go on, songwriter! Our response should be "Thank You. What can I now do for You? How can I lead a life of gratitude? Lord, You left Your place of glory to make Yourself poor on my behalf. Now, in light of what You've done for me, I say 'Thank You' and I now leave my place of glory and go to places of poverty for the sake of Your glory." We should leave what we have, as Paul did, and suffer for His sake. We should live to serve and to do all things for the glory of God, the Preeminent One.

Romans 12:6 reminds us that we all have different gifts. God has called us to these varied gifts. While we all experience the same salvation, we've been sent out to do different things. We have been given the same grace, but this manifests itself in different ways. We need to be careful and examine our hearts as we do this. As we use our gifts, we may be tempted to think that our ministry isn't effective. We may be tempted to think that what we're doing is wrong. Therefore, here are some reminders as you go about your ministry:

1. **Be careful not to covet other ministries.** Paul has endured a lot in his service to God. Paul never says, "It sure would be nice to change with someone. I would like to change my job description. I'm tired of making known the mystery of God to the Gentiles." However, this happens to us far too often. We don't like where God has us. We look at what God is doing in someone else's life and in someone else's ministry, and we covet. "I want that. I want to be part of that ministry. They are experiencing blessing and growth. I want to be part of that." When we begin to covet what God is doing in someone else's life we are not being satisfied with how He is working in our own life. This is a great sin for us as pastors as we see what other churches and pastors are doing. Many pastors begin to lust after those opportunities instead of being content with the people to whom God has called us. Perhaps you don't struggle with this, but I have. Ten years ago, I was able to get together for lunch with my mentor, who wanted to connect me with a visiting pastor from out of town. When we had lunch together, my mentor said, "I am sitting with two of the up-and-coming pastors in the United States." That other guy was on the cusp of some great things and I walked away feeling good about myself. Ten years went by. The other pastor is now pastoring a church of 10,000. He is one of the most tweeted individuals and followed by more Christians than anyone else. I sat back and thought, "Why is this not happening to me? Why can't I have some of that fame?" What I began to recognize, with the help of my wife and others, is that the other pastor's ministry was not mine to covet. When we covet ministry it is no different from a married individual coveting another person's spouse. It's not for you to have. I began to understand that while my eyes were focused on someone else's ministry instead of on what God wanted: my ministry here.

Don't covet other people's ministries. If it is from God and for God, then it's not about you and me. It's not about prestige, numbers and influence. God wants us to serve Him.

2. **Be careful not to complain about your ministry.** Notice all the times where Paul says how much he hates his apostolic ministry, how much he despises being in prison, how it continually grates upon him to teach the people the true gospel of Jesus Christ only to have those people buy into crackpot heresies. He hates all the pain, all the suffering and all that comes with the calling that God has given. Right? It's in your text. It's right there; can't you see it? No. There is none of that. While troubles mounted – he's in prison, he's been beaten, he's been persecuted, he has suffered greatly for the cause of Christ – the only thing that Paul uses to describe his ministry is: "I rejoice in my sufferings." Paul saw it as an honor to suffer a little bit for the One Who suffered more than we could imagine. Far too many of us aren't experiencing God's real calling in our lives because we're too busy arguing with God, complaining about the people and place where God has put us. In essence, we say to Him, "You messed up, God! You should have called me to a different place with a far easier ministry." Paul learned that a servant doesn't create his or her own job description; that's the job of the Master. Some of us complain because our calling isn't fun. Our calling is different from what everyone else is doing; our calling is to suffer and it may be painful. Perhaps your calling is more about endurance than enjoyment. The Master has seen fit to give you this situation. Romans 9:21 says, "Should the pot tell the Potter what He should make? No!" It is the Potter's job to shape and to mold the clay into what He wants it to be.
3. **Be careful not to create your own ministry.** Maybe you're not coveting or complaining, but maybe that is because you have come up with your own idea of what the Christian life looks like. You think the Christian life is showing up to church on Sunday, maybe being involved in a small group, and then living life how you want the rest of the week. Once you've "put in your time," you think the rest of the time is yours to spend without discretion. However Paul makes it clear that your calling is to be filled with the things of the Lord. Do all things to the glory of the Lord. Many of you have filled your life with things that are good, but God is absent. You fill your schedules so that you don't have to be obedient to God. When the church calls and says, "We need help in the children's ministry," your response is that you're busy. The church asks for monetary help in a special project, but you are over-extended. You have created your own ministry, but it is only a bunch of man-made activities that have temporal significance, worth nothing in the eternal scope of things.

This calling is not yours. It is for God and from God. You were bought with a price and now you must honor God with your body and with your life. What does that look like? What does that calling mean for each of us? Paul addresses this in the latter part of the text.

## 2. Exercise a ministry mindset every day

How do you know if you're living out God's calling? How do you know if you are fulfilling God's purpose for your life? Use these three aspects of ministry as a plumb line. Your ministry:

### Should seek to free the sinner

In Colossians 1:23, Paul says that he has dedicated his life to the gospel. He is committed to proclaiming the gospel, not only to the Colossians, but also to the entire world – Greeks and Jews. In Colossians 1:6, the Colossians themselves were busy proclaiming the gospel and it was bearing fruit. When was the last time you fulfilled this aspect of your calling? As a follower of Jesus Christ, you are now compelled by the grace that has saved you to tell others about it. Does your ministry seek to free the sinner? In Colossians 4, Paul does three things that should be part of our lives:

1. He prays for opportunities. Every morning when we wake up we need to say, "Lord, You have saved me. I could be on my way to hell. I'm no longer lost and dead in my sin. Now I have a right relationship with You, full of the hope of the gospel. For the glory of God I am going to ask that You would grant me opportunities to bring about change in the lives of others." It begins by praying – praying for the guy next to you at work or the kid next to you on the bus on your way to school. Pray for the mom next door raising her kids. Pray for a family member. "Lord, give me opportunities." Watch out, because God will grant you opportunities.
2. He boldly speaks the truth. He asks for prayer. He says, "Pray that I may boldly speak the truth of Christ." We also need to look for opportunities. When those opportunities come, we need to open our mouths and say something.

There is a quote from St. Francis of Assisi that sounds biblical, but isn't. He says, "Share the gospel with all you can and if necessary, use words." I like that to an extent. Yes, our lives should be an example. However, no one will ever come to salvation by just looking at you. People are saved by the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ. Wherever you go, whatever you do, your life must look like Christ, but it also needs to tell of the work that Christ has done. This is not reformation, but rebirth that can only happen through the proclamation of the Word of God.

3. He bears fruit. Paul says that this will bear fruit not only in our lives, but throughout the world. Aren't you glad we're part of a church that partners with ministries outside of ourselves? We know that we are not the only church doing the work of the gospel, but there are other churches that are faithfully reaching a lost world with the gospel. This should fire us up to do the same.

### **Should seek to fortify the saints**

In Colossians 1:24, Paul says that has done all of this *"...for the sake of his body, that is the church."* Paul's calling is for the benefit of the church. Your calling is not in isolation, but is done for others. I have a calling to preach and teach the Word of God. I can't do that without you, church. It would be odd for me to come into this sanctuary on a Saturday night and preach to an empty room - though I used to do that when I first started preaching. I used to preach my heart out, but nothing was accomplished by it. One time I was preaching late one Saturday night here, being kind of funny and pretended to be a televangelist in the process. Little did I know Keith Henderson, our janitor, had made his way into the sanctuary without my notice. Quiet Keith raised his hand and shouted, "When are you doing the altar call? I'm ready to come forward, pastor!" It scared the daylights out of me. That's what happens when you play with preaching. God will get you back.

Here's the thing. What good is it to be a preacher with no one to listen? With no one to teach? What good is it to be an evangelist if you never share the good news of Jesus Christ? What good is it to be one who has the gift of mercy when there's no one to show mercy to? What good is it to have the gift of hospitality if you never invite anyone to your home? What good is it to have the gift of prayer if you never pray for anyone except yourself? We have to recognize that our calling is always connected with the people of God. Here's the thing: if you're withholding your gift, you not only fail to receive the blessings of God, but you keep others from that blessing as well.

It is our job to make known the Word of God to one another. We must demonstrate "the mystery of God" (we will cover this topic next week). Our gifts and abilities, just like Paul's, must be used to grow others in the church; build up others in their lives with Christ. Husbands, how are you fortifying the faith of your wives? Wives, how are you fortifying the faith of your husbands? Parents, what are you doing to fortify the faith of your children, to grow them, to make the Word of God fully known to them? Pastors and elders, what are we doing to make sure we are growing a body of believers who are presented as mature, complete with all wisdom before Christ (Colossians 1:28)? What are you doing, congregant, to fortify the faith of those sitting around you? Paul says that this ministry is twofold:

1. It involves evangelizing.
2. It involves edifying the believer.

When you dedicate your life to the ministry of God saying, "Lord, I'm going to do this! If there's a sinner in my life, I'm going to proclaim the gospel. If there's a saint who needs to be encouraged and built up, I will do it," it may mean suffering.

### **May mean that you face suffering**

Colossians 1:24, *"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church."* Paul's life was marked by a deep desire to follow God in humility, to be a servant. What was his reward? A load of suffering. This is a real possibility for each and every one of you. Over and over again, we are told that when we tell the world about Jesus, not everyone will be happy with us. The gospel has an enemy who prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). This suffering shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone, nor should it cause you to lose your hope.

Suffering is a reminder of an important truth, one that Paul shares, that is the source of many interpretive challenges. In Colossians 1:24, Paul is *"...filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions..."* Paul, what in the world do you mean by that? Some have thought this means that Christ's work on the cross was somehow incomplete or insufficient. We know that this isn't true because in Colossians 1:20, Jesus is reconciling all things to Himself, and has reconciled us (past tense) through the work on the cross.

Hebrews 10:12 tells us that Jesus doesn't repeatedly die for peoples' sins; He died once for all and now sits at the right hand of the Father. There is nothing incomplete in the work of the cross of Jesus Christ. So what does he mean?

When we suffer for the gospel, when we face hardships and troubles because we are living faithfully for Christ, when people hurl insults at us, when we lose things for our faith, when we are persecuted for our faith, when we are ostracized for our faith, we need not lose heart or confidence, but rejoice. We are enduring from others what they wish they could do to Jesus Christ, however, since Jesus isn't bodily on earth, we will have to do. Paul reminds us as servants of Christ that we have the privilege and opportunity to take blows for Christ's sake. That should cause us to rejoice in suffering of all types. Why? For three reasons:

1. When we suffer we are assured that we are in Christ. Jesus said, "Just as they persecuted Me, they will persecute you." However, there is a difference between suffering for Christ and suffering because you are a jerk. Several people have come to me and said, "I'm being persecuted." When I ask what's causing it, I find out that the person has been an absolute jerk. I tell them, "This has nothing to do with Jesus, but everything to do with your personality." If you're suffering for Christ's sake, you can be assured that just as they crucified our Savior and Lord, now as you walk with Him, they will persecute you.
2. It fulfills an aspect of discipleship that is lacking in our day. American evangelical Christianity denies the idea of suffering. When suffering comes to the Christian, we do everything we can to remove it from our lives as soon as possible. The Christian life is summed up in suffering. God sees our suffering as a good thing. Why? It is an opportunity to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus (Matthew 16:24). That's easy to do when everything is going well. Are you willing to take up that cross when it means a road marked with suffering? We are called to follow Christ, not just in the sunshine, but also on the road that leads through the valley of the shadow of death (Psalm 23:4).
3. Suffering gives us an opportunity to imitate Christ. How? By our actions in our suffering. The Apostle Peter says, "Though Christ was reviled, he did not revile in return. Though he was beaten, he did not give blows in return" (1 Peter 2:23). Suffering gives us an opportunity to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:43-48). It gives us an opportunity to imitate Christ in the way that He dealt with His enemies. He let his life go for the sake of our salvation. Do you see suffering as an opportunity to endure light and momentary trials so that you might gain the inheritance to come (2 Corinthians 4:17)?

Many of us aren't willing to free the sinner or fortify the saint because we are too worried about what it will cost. When we choose the Club-Med ride instead of the Christ-like road, we miss out on what Paul calls "the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27), which is filled with riches. Far too many of us are living for the dot of this earthly life at the expense of the infinite life that symbolizes eternity. This was true for the Colossians and it is true for us today. The gifts that God has given us are for the benefit of the church around us.

### **3. Move People to Maturity**

How does Village Bible Church, how does the church at Colossae, become a church filled with people who are committed to God's calling? Who exercise their faith every day? We do what Paul did and disciple people. Our vision statement at Village Bible Church makes this clear. We want to be a family of growing believers, not stagnant believers, not Sunday morning believers, not American believers, but maturing believers, who grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. We want to be people, as Paul says in Colossians 1:23, who are in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that we have heard. The job of the church is not to entertain you. It is not to keep you busy. It's not a goal to pack the house or be a factory of great programs and ministries. Paul's goal for the Colossians, and for Village Bible Church as well, is to be a church that moves people to great maturity in Christ Jesus. How do we do that? This movement should be:

#### **Instructional**

Colossians 1:25 says we are to make known the Word of God fully. We are to know the Scriptures and reveal it to everyone. At the end of the passage, Paul uses the word "everyone" three times. We must warn everyone, teach everyone, so that we may present everyone. This is for men and women, young and old, rich and poor, all of us. The job of the church is to see no man or woman left behind. So what do we do? We admonish. Paul says in Colossians 1:28, "...warning everyone..." The word "warn" means admonish. It carries the idea of warning or helping someone; to set someone's mind in a proper order; to bring them back from distraction. Our mission at the church is to help people cease to be distracted by the things of this world and bring them back to

being focused on the things of God. We must be willing to do this, but it won't be easy. We must admonish one another in a spirit of love. We need to be willing to receive warning and correction when we need it.

It involves teaching. This refers to the clear communication of God's Word. At Village Bible Church, no matter what we teach – parenting, money, women's issues, men's issues, teen issues, elderly issues, children's issues – it is done in light of Colossians 1:28; it is Christ Whom we proclaim. No matter what we're talking about, we ask, "What would Jesus do? What does He demand of us? What does He demand of our children, of our teenagers, of our finances, of our outreach, of our fellowship and care for one another?" Paul will address this in the weeks to come. We are called to be consistent. When we do that it will be impactful.

## Impactful

As a church admonishes and teaches its people, there is a result. What is the result? The great mystery: we will begin to experience Christ in us, the hope of glory (1:27). We will become smaller and Christ will become larger. Our speech will change. Our thinking will change. Our view of outsiders will change. Our actions toward believers and non-believers will change. Our lives will be fine-tuned, becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. We will become, as one of the church fathers said, "little Christs" for the world to see. When you walk into work, may people say, "There's Jesus."

## Intentional

What is our focus? *"That we may present everyone mature in Christ."* That word there literally means "fully grown." Our job is not just to admonish, or just to teach, but we do this to create spiritually mature Christ followers. We do this so that you may grow, so that you and I may become like Christ. Our focus can't be on numeric growth; it's got to be on spiritual growth. It can't be on building buildings; it's about building believers. It can't be about information; it has to be about transformation. It can't simply be about moving people here and there, but being serious about moving people to maturity. But it can't be lazy or passive in our response to it.

## Intense

Paul says, "To this end I labor." He is referring to proclaiming Christ and presenting believers as perfect or mature. The word "labor" means to grow weary because of hard toil. The word "struggle" comes from the Greek word that's translated agony. Both words are used to speak of an athlete who competes in an arena. What this means is that when we are living out our calling from God, when we're exercising our faith every day, it means we will labor to the point of exhaustion. Paul says that he was like a drink offering being poured out, to the place that all of who he was was being poured into the ministry of Christ. That means that at times we will lay ourselves out completely spent, completely fatigued, in order that we may move people to full devotion in Jesus Christ. I am humbled that I am part of a church in which so many are willing to do this. If you're tired as you reach others, if you're wiped out in raising up others in the name and ways of Christ Jesus, then you're in the company of the apostle Paul. That's hall of fame company. But Paul doesn't do this in his own strength. It is done through the energy that God gives, that He works powerfully within us. Paul says to strive according to God's energy and He will powerfully energize you. We have to be willing to surrender our availability so that we may have God's ability to change the world. Since Christ is in you, the hope of glory, He will provide everything you need – all the supernatural strength and explosive energy for you to propel people to maturity in Christ. But it means we have to be committed to His calling. We must be willing to exercise our faith every day – in our church, schools, workplace, neighborhoods, and to the uttermost parts of the world. We can't give up. We can't hold back. We can't grow lazy and lethargic. We must use the pattern that Paul has given to fulfill the calling, to be the servant of Christ who now promises that when we labor and lean on Him that He will give us the strength and the victory that we need each and every day.