



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Looking for a Few Good Men

Preeminent. Christ's Place in the World | Part 7

Tim Badal | January 25, 2015 | Colossians 2:1-5



We've been in a series on Colossians entitled, "Preeminent," which tries to see how the Bible articulates Christ's preeminence. He is first place. He is *numero uno*. He is over all things, including our lives and our worship and our walks with Him. I was thinking, as I was preparing and praying about this sermon, that this is a sweet time for us as a people. I hope you recognize that this is the only time during the week when our whole church body gathers together for corporate worship. And we do a lot of talking with one another, whether we're at small groups, whether we're in fellowship activities, whether we're sitting around tables eating meals with one another, whether we find ourselves being dismissed from worship, we're a group of talkers. Yet, there is one time, one moment in our week where we as the church become silent and God begins to speak. This realization that I am the only one talking during this time has been weighing heavily on me this week. The reminder that I am simply a mouthpiece while the church listens and God talks is incredibly humbling.

So as we take God's Word in our hands, I hope this won't just become curriculum, but that we will understand that what we are reading from the book of Colossians, as with all of Scripture, is God's Love Letter to us. God is speaking to us and I pray that we will open our ears and hearts to what God has to say. He wants to encourage us. He wants to challenge us. He wants to give us words that bring life. I'm not sure about you, but I could use some life in my life. I could use some hope. I could use some joy. I could use some peace in a world that is filled with war and strife.

With that reminder, let's turn to Colossians 2:1-5. We'll begin reading in Colossians 1:24 and read through Colossians 2:5. Our focus today will be on the first five verses of chapter two. Let's look at the text together:

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. For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

I remember a number of different commercials from my childhood. I remember, in particular, commercials where men and women were called to consider serving in the Armed Forces. My favorite one, of course, was for the Marines. They were looking for a "Few Good Men." They were looking for "The Few, the Proud, the Marines." I remember in some of them, they would show men who were willing to be challenged and shaped. They were cut down to size. I remember one in particular that started with a long piece of iron in the fire, which was being beaten and sharpened. It served as a symbol of what happened to men and women who joined the Marines. At the end of the commercial, the rough piece of iron became the gleaming sword placed in the sheath of the graduated Marine dressed in full regalia. They used this metaphor so that people would understand that you didn't

have to be perfect, you didn't have to have your life all put together. In fact, the Marines say, "We'll take care of getting you ready. We'll take care of the hard work of taking young civilians and making them into lean, mean fighting machines, ready to go into the fiercest battle with cool, collected heads."

Within our text, I was struck by Paul's words that seem incredibly similar to that advertisement. I'm not sure if this is Paul's intention, but as a pastor I read these words and see a calling—an advertisement—for men to go into ministry and do things effectively, things that will change them, shape them and make them into a fierce fighting team for God and His Kingdom. Remember that we are all called to be priests; we're all called to be pastors. Whether that's our vocation or not, God has created us to be a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). We are all called to serve and honor God, to be the fighting team that God has called us to be. However, what should we look for in these types of people? As I thought about this passage I asked the question, "What should a pastor look like? What does a person who diligently wants to be one of those 'few good' men or women in God's army look like?"

As I thought about my own ministry, I said to myself, "Well, maybe I need to make sure I do a really, really good job preaching because that's the name of the game these days in the pastoral world." How many people are listening to your pod casts? How many people are downloading your sermon material? I'm tempted to think that that is the important thing. Then I began to think about numbers. All the big name pastors pastor big churches. I mean, when was the last time that you heard of a famous pastor who pastors a church of 50 people? If it's all about numbers, maybe the goal is to preach and lead in such a way that the church just keeps getting bigger. Then I thought that maybe pastors should be like CEO's of conglomerates. Maybe that's what it means to be a strong pastor, to be known as a leadership guru where people come and grow under your tutelage.

But then I read the Apostle Paul. While the world may say that church leaders should be well-known business all-stars, Paul's words slap us in the face and remind us of the reality of what Christian ministry looks like. Paul is looking for a few good men and a few good women to serve the church in the city of Colossae. He reminds us that if we give ourselves wholly over to the work of God, it's not going to be easy. It's going to be difficult, especially if you think this is merely a job and not a calling. Colossians 1:25 says that Paul had become a minister according to the stewardship from God Himself. He had been called. He had been given a task. Each of us has been given a task. At the end of chapter two, we learn that Paul invested time, energy, blood, sweat and tears to this endeavor. He struggled to fulfill that calling.

Look at Colossians 2:1. Paul does what many in the pastoral world would be told not to do: he speaks his heart. He becomes real and transparent. In Colossians 2:1, he says, "*For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you.*"

1. Pastoral leadership is transparent. It has nothing to hide. It literally lives in a display window. When I say, "pastoral leadership," it doesn't just mean what I do, or any of the other pastors do, but pastoral leadership means that we have a place within the church where we are serving other people, meeting one another's needs for the glory of God. That's pastoral ministry. For a church to be healthy, it must be filled with people who are serving so that, as Rick Warren states, "Every member is a minister." Everybody has their part and they're doing their thing, pastoring the flock of God. So Paul wants us to know that he is a real person who has struggles, issues and things that are on his mind. He is transparent.
2. He says that he's caring. "*For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you.*" Paul is saying, "I want you to know that I'm thinking about you. I want you to know that I'm worried about you. I want you know that your concerns are my concerns; your problems are my problems; your fears are my fears. I love you so much that I'm willing, even though I'm far away, even though I haven't met you, I've heard about you and my heart is filled with concern for you."

Pastoral ministry is transparent and filled with care. It's not simply this "top-down" mentality; pastoral ministry is a "bottom-up" idea. It starts with people who are serving and honoring God through their lives. As they do that, some will rise to the top and be affirmed by a congregation to serve in various leadership roles in organized leadership. So Paul says that if you're going to do that, if you're going to make your life's calling a calling to serve and honor God by ministering and shepherding people and caring for people, then you have to be transparent and true. There are three things that are imperative for good and godly leadership within the church. Good and godly leadership will help the church:

1. Recognize the Struggles that We All Face

Good leaders will help the church recognize the struggles of others. Paul says, *"For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you."* Then Paul goes on to talk about the neighboring city of Laodicea. Many of these letters were written to a particular group of people and then handed off to other house churches in other cities to be read by more believers. So Paul addresses two different churches and he says, "I want you to know that I struggle for all of you right where you are."

Paul uses the word "struggle" which is the Greek word *agon*. It's where we get the word "agony." It was an athletic word that described a competitor who gave all that he had in the ring of competition. Literally, it was used in the ancient Olympics for wrestling. They were literally wrestling with this thing. So Paul says, "I want you to know that I am wrestling for you." Later in Colossians 4, Paul says that Epaphras "is busy wrestling in prayer, agonizing in his walk with you, lifting your names up to the Lord."

Next Saturday, I will be playing in an alumni basketball tournament at my high school. However, my competitive heart is bigger than what this earthly vessel can stomach. When I get on the court, I will give it my all. I'm going to agonize. The problem is that my old pacemaker and the lungs that God has given me aren't going to be able to keep up. I know that Saturday night, Amanda will have to be my doctor and nurse because I'm going to give my all and I'm going to come back a broken and beaten man.

This idea of struggling means that Paul is giving his all so that at the end of the day, he is spent. He strives as hard as he can at his work, knowing that it's not going to be easy. For those who desire to serve the church—whether as teachers, as small group leaders, as people behind the scenes, as people up front, as elders or pastors, all of us need to recognize that it is not going to be easy.

Turn in your Bible for a moment to the book of 1 Corinthians. As Paul closes out this incredibly difficult letter, he gives us a reminder. In 1 Corinthians 15:58 Paul says, *"Therefore, my beloved brothers..."* Notice that he doesn't say, "My beloved pastors, elders, deacons, ministry leaders..." No he says, *"Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."* Let's stop there for a moment. When you give your life to the service of God, it's not going to be easy. Notice that it does not say, "always abounding in the fun of the Lord," or "always abounding in the rest and relaxation of the Lord," or "always abounding in the vacation of the Lord." No. Paul says that it is work. It's going to be difficult.

To add insult to injury, he doesn't just say, "the work of the Lord," and leave it at that, but he goes on to say, *"...knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."* That word "labor" is the Greek word *kopos*. It meant an intense labor united with trouble, toil, laboring to the point of exhaustion and extreme weariness. What in the world would cause this? Why would people who give themselves to the work of the Lord suffer? TV preachers are constantly saying that giving yourself to the work of the Lord results in monetary blessing, peace and rest from all labor. Well, Colossians reminds us that being a Christian means that we are all part of a common struggle. In Colossians 1, it's not just a little struggle but, *"how great a struggle I have for you."* These struggles:

Involve a common battle

Paul is not describing a life that's only true for a select group of people. He's speaking to the church. He's reminding us that as believers this life of following Christ will be difficult. This is a common experience for believers. We're going to struggle. Now where do these struggles come from?

They come from the obstacles of life. Where in the text do we see this? Within the text there is a context to the situation. The context for Colossians is that Paul is in difficult and uneasy circumstances. In Colossians 4:18, Paul says, *"I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains."* Paul was imprisoned. We're not sure exactly what that looked like. It could have been a house-arrest situation where he had some freedom. It sounds like people came to visit him, like Timothy who was helping him write this letter. We know that "chains"—whether symbolic or literal—refers to a limitation on what Paul could do. He was limited in his friendships and no doubt felt isolated and alone. He felt vulnerable because he was locked up while troubles mounted and he could do nothing about them. There were people who were badmouthing and slandering him, but he could not respond. He felt enslaved. Chains remind us that he could not determine where he went or what he was able to do. He found himself in a place where someone else was in charge.

I wonder if Paul felt that his life was not what he had signed up for. Jesus had been true and real to Paul on the day of Paul's journey to Damascus. When Jesus told Ananias to bring back Paul's sight, he told Ananias that Paul would suffer greatly for the

gospel of Jesus Christ. Wherever Paul went there was trouble. Paul bared his soul to people he had never met. We have a first-hand look into Paul's struggle in 2 Corinthians 1:8. *"For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself."* That's real. Paul says, "I wanted to die!"

Have you had days like that when life is so difficult, so troublesome? Days when the obstacles of life are bearing down on you so that you say, "Lord, just be done with it. I'm done being the crash-test dummy. I want to be out of here. I'm tired of life." You find yourself in chains. You feel like you are in prison. Yet, Paul doesn't share these words so that you can feel sorry for him, for people to come to his aid or to gain a following as a martyr. No. He does what a good leader should do and shares his heart with other people so that they can know they are not in the battle alone.

It isn't like life is good for one person and bad for another. No matter who you are or how faithful you are in the ministry of the gospel, it will be difficult. As an elder, I am privy to so much more than I can bear at times. I say that, not in exhaustion, but only so you know that there is a lot of hurt, even here in our own church. Yet, we come to church and lie, "I'm fine. You're fine. We're all fine." We do this with a smile on our faces while we die on the inside. We are struggling, agonizing, wrestling with the things of this world, the obstacles of life.

Some of you barely got here because you are wearied by your current struggles. Your marriage, your parenting, your kids, are taking you to places you never thought you would go. Some of you are dealing with bad home lives right now. Behind those smiles, your home life is driving you mad. Perhaps it's the spouse or child that you don't have an answer for. Maybe it's your job, that dead-end job, that job where you don't make enough, that job where the boss is constantly riding you, that job where you are the misfit Christian who is smirked at and laughed at. You just want to give in. You're agonizing. Maybe it's your health. Once you had vitality and everything going for you and now even taking a breath or a step is agony. It is a struggle to get out of bed. Maybe it's depression, those voices and thoughts, those insecurities, the guilt over decisions of the past. They lead you to a darker and darker place. Maybe it's your finances. You work and work and work and the only thing that is constant is the bill collectors' calls. Maybe you have concerns about yesterday, today or tomorrow. Paul was struggling. To make him a super-saint without issues, fears or struggles in his life is to make him something that is not human. He was a man who was struggling.

You might think, "Paul is a lot different than me. How in the world could Paul do all that he did if he was struggling as badly as I am?" I believe that Paul took the words of Christ in John 16:33 to heart. Jesus told His disciples, "In this world you will have trouble. You're going to struggle. You're going to wrestle with this life, but take heart." Take heart, Village Bible Church. Take heart, mom who's struggling with a wayward or struggling kid. Take heart, spouse of an unfaithful spouse. For the one who finds himself or herself in a dead-end job, take heart. Take heart, depressed one, Jesus has overcome the world. A good and godly leader is one who speaks from a place of difficulty, but Paul doesn't say, "Oh, woe is me. Oh, this is so bad. I hate my life." He deals with these difficulties by always looking to the promises of God.

Obedience to Christ is another struggle. We are going to struggle with this world, dealing with some of the things that tempt us. The first struggle deals with the trials of this world; the second deals with the temptations of this world. Paul tells us, "My job is to make you mature in Christ, to grow you." Do you know that that's your calling as a person involved in a local church? Your job is to be actively engaged in the life of others, encouraging them, edifying them, equipping them so that they might become more like Christ each and every day.

Here's the problem: living in this world is difficult. We are bombarded with all sorts of evil and sin and recklessness that are contrary to the things of God. Our enemies are not easily dealt with. Turn in your Bible to Colossians 3:5-10 and see what Paul says. He says, "Okay. We've dealt with the obstacles of life. I'm in jail and I have to deal with that." Here's the second enemy:

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

Your fight with sin isn't, "Just don't do it on Sundays." Your fight with sin isn't, "Just don't do it in your body." It deals with the heart, the mind and the lust of the eyes (1 John 2:16). It doesn't just say, "Try to diminish it as much as possible." Paul says, "Put it to death." We all have lives that we're fighting with, flesh that's beating us up. The life of Christ is going to be an everyday battle where we will have to kill things. You will have to kill things that feel so right and put on things that feel so odd. That's the Christian walk. Welcome to being a Christian. Smile. Isn't it great?

So we have a battle that's going on and trouble that's all around us. What's the good news in this? A leader always gives an answer. A leader always gives hope. Paul describes not only a common battle, but also a common bond.

Demand a common bond

What is the common bond in our struggles? Colossians 2:2, "*That their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ.*" Stop lying about the battle. Stop pretending, "I'm okay. You're okay. We're all okay." We're not okay. Life is hard. It's not easy and it's not going to get any easier. That's one reason why heaven is such a beautiful place. We should look forward to a place where there will be no more crying, no more trouble and no more pain (Revelation 21:4); a place where the old is gone and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). Christ didn't leave us here and say, "You know, stick with this horrible life for a while and maybe I'll show up at some point." He gave us the church. He gave us believers. He's promised, not a life free from trouble and temptation, but a life where we have others to struggle alongside us.

What will this hope involve? It's going to involve:

1. Encouragement. "*That their hearts may be encouraged.*" That word "encourage" is *parakaleō* in the Greek. It is the word that describes our Helper Who comes alongside another. The Holy Spirit is called, "The Paraclete," the One Who comes alongside us, Who intercedes on our behalf. This use of *parakaleō* is an abiding encouragement received from other believers.
2. Knitting together. One translation says that they are "welded together" —they are stuck like glue together. The Christian life is not too difficult when we are connected with others, when we have brothers and sisters around us who bear our burdens, people who gently restore us when we are caught in sin (Galatians 6:1). This life is too difficult to live by ourselves. God has graced us with the gift of other people. On Friday, we had a great time of vision and sharing at our annual meeting. Many who were there will agree with me when I say that one of the best parts of the night was the opportunity we had as members to read our commitments to one another. Commitments that remind us, "It's not about me; it's about others. I'm not in this battle alone. I have brothers and sisters who have committed themselves to walk arm-in-arm with me so that I can take on the world and all of its trials." How is that kind of community created? How are we knit together? The phrase "knit together" is in the passive voice, meaning it's not because of something that we do, but because of what Christ does within us. We have been knit together, welded together, by Christ Himself. We have been given the same faith, the same hope and the same love.
3. Love. Love leads the way. Paul says, "Okay. Your hearts need to be encouraged so you need to be knit together with people *in love.*" Love leads the way. Love breaks down racial and social divisions. Love is willing to cover a multitude of sins. Love speaks the truth. Love stoops down to serve. Love sacrifices. Love pushes away personal preferences and pursuits for another. Love does not think ill of someone, but believes the best, hopes the best. Love trusts and endures (1 Corinthians 13). Where do we learn to love like that? From the life and example of Jesus Christ—how Jesus loved us.

Jesus now reminds us that while we may have trouble in this world, while tribulation surrounds us and temptation closes in on every side, we have brothers and sisters who are called to be like Christ on our behalf. We too are to be like Christ for them. Good leaders not only lead, they also emulate Christ in everything they do. So whatever struggles you're dealing with, whatever trials and temptations, the answer is not to sit and feel sorry for yourself, but to get together with a group of people who are committed to being knit in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, who show love to one another in order that others might be encouraged and equipped to stand strong no matter what.

What else does a pastoral leader do? What else should we do?

2. Remember the Secret that is Now Fulfilled

Leaders must help the people under their care remember the secret that is now fulfilled. Three times in our text we see the word "mystery." What is the mystery? What is Paul talking about? If we are leading in the church, whether it's Sunday School kids, a small group or in the pulpit, we need to promote love by reminding people of the will of God. Our love has to be based in something. Paul says that it's based in the full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery. We can say that we love one another apart from Christ and it's just going to be mushy stuff, suitable only for the Hallmark network. However,

when our love is connected to Christ there is some weight to it; there's a form and foundation to our love that will help us know what we are called to do.

When Paul talks about this "mystery," he's beating down the door of the false teachers. When people talk about being spiritual, it may sound good, but what does it mean to be spiritual or enlightened? We use these phrases that no one understands, but everyone is impressed by. They sound great, but many of the false teachers said that wisdom and knowledge was a mystery only for a few select saints. Paul addresses this teaching by reminding us, in Colossians 1:26, that the mystery that was hidden has now been revealed. To whom? To His saints. What is this mystery?

The mystery of God is the will of God revealed in His Word. What does it consist of? It is the gospel of Jesus Christ Who has offered Himself as the Savior to both Jew and Gentile alike. The secret that Paul speaks of:

Was hidden in the past. . .

Colossians 1:26 says, *"...the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints."* I want you to understand the depth of this. Paul uses two words: "ages" and "generations." Ages describe eons. God has had a plan to redeem us back to Himself by the gift of His Son Jesus Christ before the foundations of the world. Get that in your mind. Before this earth was ever around, before the sun was placed in the heavens, we were in the thoughts of God Himself. No one else knew about it except for the other Persons in the Godhead. The angels didn't know about it. We didn't know about it, obviously, because we weren't around yet. Somewhere in eternity past, God had a plan for salvation.

Paul also uses the word "generations." This means that when humanity was brought into the world, in the Garden of Eden, God had a plan. Before sin, God had a plan. When the man and woman sinned in the Garden, God had a plan. For all the generations from Adam to Abraham to Moses and down through the prophets, God had a plan. He had a plan for a woman named Mary. He had a plan for a man named Joseph. They would be the earthly mother and father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He had a plan for the disciples. He had a plan for the Apostle Paul. He had a plan for the Reformers in the 16th century. He has a plan for you today. He has a plan. It was hidden in the past.

Hebrews 11 reminds us of this truth. Over and over again men and women took steps of faith. They didn't know what they were taking steps towards. They obeyed God and it was credited to them as righteousness (Romans 4). They pursued obedience even when it was hard. The text tells us that they did not get what they were promised. Abraham knew that he would be a father of many nations, that his descendants would outnumber the stars in the heavens. However, he didn't see the fulfillment of that promise. Now we see it. Now we can rejoice in it. Abraham would have to wait. The prophets also would write chapter after chapter of the Old Testament, but as they wrote they had no idea what the fulfillment would be. Where do I get that? First Peter 1:10-11 says:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

The prophets didn't have full knowledge of the gospel that we received. The angels didn't understand it. It was hidden for all time until the point when Jesus entered the world.

Has been revealed in a Person. . .

That which was hidden has been revealed in a Person. Hebrews 1:1-4 says:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

We celebrate December 25 as Jesus' birthday. The hidden riches of the glory of God were made evident at His birth in a manger in Bethlehem. That mystery, that secret, is a Person. It is Jesus.

And now promises great possessions. . .

Jesus has promised great possessions for all who believe. In Colossians 1:27, *"...are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."* Moses doesn't have a thing on us. Moses got to see the backside of God on Mt. Sinai. That's pretty cool, right? Moses got to talk with God. That's pretty interesting. He heard the voice of God. That's pretty awesome. However,

Moses didn't have the living God residing within him. He didn't have the presence of the Holy Spirit in his life. While you may say, "I wish I could talk with God like Moses did," Moses is sitting in heaven saying, "I wish I had the Holy Spirit living in me. I didn't even see that coming. I thought the Law was it!" He didn't have a clue of what God had planned.

For all who believe.

The Bible makes it clear: "*What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.*" God prepared the Third Person of the Trinity for His people, to come and reside in the Temple of each of our hearts. Paul says that we have "*Christ in us the hope of glory.*" If that doesn't rattle you, if the thought that you were on the mind of God before the foundations of the world doesn't help you when all hell breaks loose or temptation comes, then you don't recognize that Christ is in you. He is the hope of glory. Christ, in His heart and in His plan, came to reconcile us back to Himself that the Holy Spirit might live and reside in us. He then intercedes on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God. If that doesn't get you fired up, if that doesn't make you want to struggle with all of your might for the sake of the gospel, then you're missing something.

What should we do with all of this? Well, Paul says that we need to teach it. We need to warn people. We need to make people aware of it. When we do, there's one final thing that good leadership does.

3. Rejoice in the Stability of Following Christ

Good leadership rejoices in the stability of following Christ. Like a good parent, Paul says in Colossians 2:5, "*For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit.*" A parent would understand that, right? Amanda and I are now in the process of allowing our oldest son to go off and experience things by himself. Maybe it's because I'm a naïve, young father, but when he's gone I find myself wondering what he's doing and how he's living. I wonder if he's having a good time, if he's safe, if he has everything that he needs. When he gets home, I want to know what he did, who he talked with, where he went. Then my heart is broken when I ask, "How was it?" and the only response I get is, "Fine." "What did you do?" "Stuff." That drives me crazy! I want to know about his life. I want to know the highs and lows, what he was feeling and thinking. Now I sound like my wife.

Paul, like a good parent, wants to know how the children are doing. When they grow, there is no greater joy for a pastor. To see his congregants grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ brings him great joy. What does that look like?

Stability in Christ is found when we are:

1. **Delighting in the things of God.** At the beginning of Colossians 1:24, we have suffering; at the end of the verse, we have affliction. At the end of Colossians 1, there is more struggling. At the beginning of chapter two, there is more struggling. That doesn't sound very good. However, at the front and back end of this book, Paul says, "I rejoice." Brother and sister, if you find yourself in the throes of trials and temptations and tribulation, can you rejoice in those times? That's how you know that God is with you. Can you delight in the promises of God? The God Who knew you before the foundations of the world, Who knit you together in your mother's womb, God Who has redeemed and reconciled you has not left you to be by yourself. He's never going to leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). He's given us all that we need. He's going to see that the work He began in you will come to completion (Philippians 1:6). Can you find joy in the journey? Can you find joy when life is difficult? Can you delight in the riches of the glory of Jesus Christ. Can you delight in the hope of glory, which is Christ in you? Can you tap into that and make your dwelling place in the shadow of the Almighty? Because when you do, you're not going to be disappointed. And that's what Paul wants for the Colossians. That's what I, and the elders, want for this church—that we would be a people who delight in the things of God, no matter the circumstances of life.
2. **Discerning when it comes to what we believe.** In verse 4, Paul says he does all this, he struggles, he has afflictions. His heart is heavy for the people, that they may not be deluded with plausible arguments. The idea here of "plausible arguments" is "clever catchphrases." Paul recognizes what every pastor should know: Beliefs will always determine your behavior. Paul is concerned that the Colossians will fall to some sort of harmful teaching. We need pastors and teachers who teach and train people how to know the good from the counterfeit. I was grieved this last week when I saw a list of the twenty-five most-sold Christian books of 2014. Here is my assessment of them: They are filled with people who are advocating harmful teaching. Nineteen of the twenty-five books I would throw in the trash. We live in a world that has more information at its fingertips than all the generations before us combined. I think sadly that the Christian IQ has fallen, because we're buying into all sorts of teachings that sound compelling,

that have the name “Christian,” but have little substance to them. So we as pastors need to do all we can. You as teachers need to help the students in your small groups and the children in your own homes to be equipped, knowing what the plausible arguments are, how to defend against them so that they may know that the way of Christ is the right way.

3. **Disciplining our lives to embrace holiness.** In Colossians 2: 5, Paul says, “I rejoice at seeing your good order and firmness of faith in Christ. The phrase “good order” literally speaks of discipline. In the context, the idea is that there will not be stragglers in an army that is led well, that they’re not swayed by the distractions of the battlefield, that there is no breach in the line. Good leaders help people hold the line. There are a lot of reasons for us to bolt from our service to Christ, but godly leaders will do all they can to stand in the gap and be strong and model a firmness and steadfastness in their obedience to Jesus Christ. We’re in a battle, and we need men and women who are willing to take the mantle and serve the body of Christ wherever God has called them to serve—to help the church recognize the struggles that we face, remember the secret of Christ Jesus which is now fulfilled, and to help people rejoice in the stability of what it means to follow Jesus Christ. Will you be that man? Will you be that woman, who takes upon yourself that mantle? Paul says it’s going to be a struggle, but it is the thing that brings him the greatest of rejoicing.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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