

INTRODUCTION

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

Colossians 2 : 6-7

HOW THE GOSPEL CHANGES US

The gospel is the good news that Jesus saves sinners. As Christians, we realize that we are sinful and turn to Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. We are saved by belief in the finished work of Jesus - not how much we know about the Bible or our own ability to follow a moral code of conduct. The moment we turn to Jesus to be our Savior, we are saved from our sin and brought into an eternal relationship with him. This decision of faith leads to a lifetime of devotion to Jesus that begins here on earth and stretches into eternity.

And here's another piece of good news for us as Christians: Jesus doesn't leave us where we are upon conversion. The rest of our lives will be the process of being transformed more and more into the image of Jesus, which is what the Bible calls sanctification (more on that later). Jesus not only saves us but calls us to be his disciples, which means that following him is an all-of-life endeavor.

A disciple genuinely follows Jesus in normal daily life. Followers of Jesus hate sin because of their love for him. They love his word, the Bible, and submit to its authority while studying it to learn more about him. They love his church and seek to foster relationships with fellow believers while sacrificing their time and money for the benefit of the church. They love his mission and live to point others to him while making more disciples.

Have you noticed any particular aspects of your life that have begun to change due to following Jesus?

A LIFE OF REPENTANCE AND BELIEF

It is likely that one of the things you've noticed about being a Christian up until this point is that you haven't stopped sinning. As hard as you've tried, there are areas of your life where you can see active rebellion to Jesus and just can't get it under control. The gospel brings good news again. Being a Christian isn't about being perfect; it's about being repentant and having faith in Jesus' perfection on our behalf. The Bible tells us that when we see sin in our lives, we should confess it to God and others and actively seek to turn away from it. That's what repentance is. The Bible also tells us that the root of our sin is that we aren't correctly believing something that is true about the gospel. So, we replace false belief with the good news of what's true about God and us. The life cycle of a Christian will always be moving through repentance and belief, repentance and belief, repentance and belief. The longer you follow Jesus, the more clearly you'll see your sin, and the more beautiful your Savior will become.

GOSPEL-CENTERED COMMUNITY ON MISSION

So where do you go from here? How is this going to affect your marriage and how you parent? How will your changed heart affect how you interact with teachers and other students? How will it impact which major you choose? What will retirement look like as a follower of Christ? How are you supposed to figure all of this out? The short answer: with others. Christianity is not meant to be experienced alone. All this and more is why our church seeks to exist as a gospel-centered community on mission. That means we're a group of people following Jesus in relationships with other believers as we seek to make more disciples of Jesus. You've got a team of people to walk

through life with now - they're your new family. Your Community Group will be the ones that get to help answer your questions. They're the ones you'll call at 2:00 am when you've just received bad news. They're the ones you'll serve beside at a local school to help meet the needs in our community. And while you're doing this, Jesus will be at work in your life.

How has your community group positively impacted your life since becoming a Christian?

SO WHAT'S THE POINT OF THE BOOK?

Our goal in *Believer* is to help you grow in your understanding of the gospel in order to live your life in a manner worthy of Jesus. We desire to live everyday life as if we know and believe the gospel - that Jesus is supreme over all of creation and through his death and resurrection has redeemed us and made us right with God.

To help us do that, *Believer* walks through the book of Colossians emphasizing some important concepts about following Jesus while building in the disciplines of Bible Reading and Prayer. The hope is that by the time you've completed this book, you'll feel better equipped to read the Bible on your own and talk to God regularly. We believe that all of this is empowered by the Holy Spirit as we seek to grow closer to Jesus.

If you have questions about the scripture that are not addressed in this book, you can talk to your Community Group. Mill City Church has also done a series on Colossians, which can be found at www.MillCityColumbia.com/sermons.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

Each chapter in the book will contain two items:

- Scripture Journal - questions to help you engage with the text as you read
- Discussion Guide - guided conversation for you and somebody in your group

HERE ARE THE STEPS:

1. Read the passage before you get together (read the section multiple times)
2. Use the questions to help study the passage
3. Refer to the commentary in the back of the book for any confusing words or phrases
4. Meet with somebody in your group to walk through the discussion guide.

All in all, our prayer is that you'll grow closer to Jesus during this process and have a clearer understanding of what it means to actively follow him for the rest of your life in the context of community on mission.

SECTION 1: COLOSSIANS 1:1-23

As you read through the next section of Colossians, use the following questions to help you understand the main ideas of the passage.

WHAT IS THE PASSAGE SAYING?

What was the main point? What was confusing? What words should I look up? Do I understand this? How would I explain it to a 10 year old?

WHERE DO I NEED TO REPENT?

What does it say I need to do? What does it say that I shouldn't do? Where does it expose my lack of faith? Where does the passage disagree with my beliefs/behaviors?

WHAT SHOULD I BE THANKFUL FOR?

What did I learn about God that was new or beautiful? How can I celebrate because of this?

HOW SHOULD I RESPOND?

What should I be praying about? What do I need to do?

JESUS > IDOLS

COLOSSIANS 1:1-23

BIG IDEA: THE GREATEST ISSUE WITH SIN IS NOT OUR BEHAVIOR, BUT OUR HEART. IT'S NOT JUST THAT WE JUST DISOBEYED JESUS - IT'S THAT WE START LOVING SOMETHING ELSE MORE.

At its core, all sin is a failure to believe the gospel. As Paul puts it in Romans 1:25, *“they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.”* We are led into sin whenever we look to anything other than God believing that it will provide for us what only he can. Jesus alone is supreme above all else as Colossians 1:15-20 makes undeniably clear. In Jesus, we have already been offered perfect joy, rest, and satisfaction. Through the cross, Jesus has overcome all of our shortfalls and deficiencies. The weight and burden of our sin and failure has been forever lifted from our shoulders and carried by Jesus. Our emptiness will only be satisfied in him; our fullness will only be realized in him (Colossians 1:15-23).

We were designed for our ultimate satisfaction to be found in God. As believers in Christ, we are completely fulfilled because everything we need and desire is secured in Jesus. At its root, sin is turning away from Jesus and seeking for something else to save us.

HEART IDOLATRY

Worshipping anything other than Jesus is false worship; the bible calls this idolatry. Often, we are looking to these things not for themselves, but for what we believe they provide. It's not just the money, the job, the relationship - it's what we believe they will give us. We use them to meet a deeper need or an ultimate desire. It is often helpful to look for “the sin beneath the sin,” or the root idol behind some sinful behavior. We don't simply want to address the sin itself (the fruit) - for example, “you shouldn't lie” - but address what led us to lie in the first place (the root). What did we assign such value to that we were willing to sin to protect it? What did we believe was more important than following Jesus in that moment? The question becomes “Why did you lie?”

Idolatry isn't found just in the “bad things” we do, but also in the “good things” (e.g. success, spouse, kids, etc.) that we love too much. Therefore, whenever we're looking at sin in our lives, we have to pay attention not only to the obvious sins but also areas where we have begun to place too much value on something good.

THE SIN BENEATH THE SIN

It is possible for two people to both have a sinful approach to money, but for completely different reasons. One might spend their money on themselves believing that the good life is found in the accumulation of possessions and showing others you've arrived through status symbols like expensive clothing and a nice car. The other might believe that money is the best way for them to control their destiny and guard their future. Having a certain number of zeros in their bank account let's them sleep at night knowing they'll be fine if something bad were to happen. Money is not inherently bad, but these two want it to provide what only Jesus truly can - true approval and true security. This is idolatry. Although having a savings account or a nice car aren't necessarily sinful, both need to repent of their attitudes towards money. Both need to change by believing the gospel is better. They need to believe that Jesus is a better savior than money will ever be.

JESUS > IDOLS

The answer to our heart's idolatry is not to do better, try harder, or simply get our act together. We must have a love for Jesus that overwhelms the love that we have for our false saviors. The theologian Thomas Chalmers says it this way: "The heart's desire for an ultimate object may be conquered, but it's desire to have SOME object is unconquerable. The only way to dispossess the heart of an old affection is through the expulsive power of a new one." We have to always bring our idolatry back to the gospel, because it is only through an overwhelming love for Jesus that we will ever be free from our incessant love for everything else. We must apply the gospel to the heart issue or root idol.

As you spend the rest of your life trying to follow Jesus, you will be tempted to pursue, trust, and love many things other than him. But only he will truly save or satisfy. Only he is worthy of a life of devotion. As you go through life, you will consistently need to investigate your heart and sin while fighting to believe the gospel in all aspects of your life. Once you understand why you are tempted to believe that something else is more valuable than Jesus, or that it will provide something for you that he won't, you need to remind yourself of what is true in the gospel. This can be accomplished through reading and studying scripture to better see how all your needs are met in Christ and that the gospel truly is good news in your life right now.

DISCUSSION:

What are some common surface level sins or desires that you have? (e.g. "I often lie" or "I frequently drink too much").

Where have you taken a good thing and made it an ultimate thing and begun to believe, "I need _____ in order to be happy and fulfilled." (e.g. "I spend most of my time pursuing and worrying about dating" or "All my time goes to my family.")

After you've looked into surface level desires and sin struggles - the question becomes "Why do I do this?" "What do I believe _____ will supply for me that Jesus cannot?" Take a minute and look for the underlying belief behind your surface level desires or sins.

How does the Bible say that Jesus is better than what you're pursuing? What is true about the gospel that disproves what you are believing about your desires and sins? Are there any verses from this section of Colossians that we read that help you believe this?

THIS IS WHY WE:

- Don't just try to modify our behavior, but look beneath our actions to our motivation in order to change our hearts.
- Question and evaluate even the good things that we love (family, work, exercise, ministry, etc.) to see if we are turning a good thing into an ultimate thing (I have to have _____ in order to be okay).
- We believe that ultimately all sin is idolatry and a failure to believe the gospel, and therefore should be addressed with the gospel and not just practical advice.

PRAYER APPLICATION:

Spend some time asking the Holy Spirit to reveal any idolatry in your life. Then, spend time repenting and asking Jesus to help your unbelief.

SECTION 2: COLOSSIANS 1:24-2:7

As you read through the next section of Colossians, use the following questions to help you understand the main ideas of the passage.

WHAT IS THE PASSAGE SAYING?

What was the main point? What was confusing? What words should I look up? Do I understand this? How would I explain it to a 10 year old?

WHERE DO I NEED TO REPENT?

What does it say I need to do? What does it say that I shouldn't do? Where does it expose my lack of faith? Where does the passage disagree with my beliefs/behaviors?

WHAT SHOULD I BE THANKFUL FOR?

What did I learn about God that was new or beautiful? How can I celebrate because of this?

HOW SHOULD I RESPOND?

What should I be praying about? What do I need to do?

GOSPEL FLUENCY

COLOSSIANS 1:24-2:7

BIG IDEA: GROWING IN YOUR UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION OF THE GOSPEL IS HOW YOU MATURE AS A CHRISTIAN.

CHRIST IN YOU, THE HOPE OF GLORY

In the first twenty-three verses of his letter, Paul gives a very clear picture of the gospel: Jesus is the preeminent King of the universe who died in our place for our sin and rose to life so that we might have eternal life in him. Paul begins this next section by reminding his readers of his direct call from God to spread the gospel for the sake of the church, even if that means suffering (Colossians 1:24-25). His focus begins to reveal how the gospel, *“the mystery hidden for ages... which is Christ in you, the hope of glory,”* has a direct impact on every area of our lives (Colossians 1:26). This reminds us that the gospel is the good news that sinners can be saved through Jesus’ death on the cross and have eternal life in him through his resurrection from the grave. Our “hope of glory” is that by repenting of our sin and placing faith in Jesus, we can be saved through “Christ in us.”

This is what we believe - that Christ is our hope. In this section, Paul is helping us see that this one truth affects everything. The gospel allows us to suffer for the name of Jesus, knowing we have an eternal home (Colossians 1:24). The gospel propels us to share the good news with others (Colossians 1:25). The gospel leads us to invest in the lives of people to help them grow in wisdom and maturity, both inside and outside of the church (Colossians 1:28-29). The gospel leads us to unity within the church (Colossians 2:1-2) and gives us the ability to rightly defend our faith (Colossians 2:4). But how? How does growing in our understanding of the gospel equip us and others to experience what Jesus calls us to as we follow Him?

HIM WE PROCLAIM

Paul uses verse 28 as the pivot point around which he continues to make his call to growing in maturity and wisdom as a believer: *“Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.”* The call to growing as a believer isn’t primarily wrapped up in following a certain set of rules or being as moral as possible - it’s directly linked to your ability to see how the gospel is good news in every aspect of your life. The goal is for all Christians to have such a functional understanding of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection that it can then serve as the motivation for how we live our lives.

GOOD NEWS BEFORE GOOD ADVICE

The call in the gospel is a call to believe, which is how we grow to maturity as a Christian. The gospel is not advice on how we ought to live in order to make Jesus love us but rather is the news of what Jesus has done on our behalf because of his great love for us. While advice may be helpful, it certainly isn’t the goal. People do not need advice - they need Jesus. We apply the good news to ourselves which allows us to move from a self-centered, sinful lifestyle to a life that is fully surrendered to Jesus. All of our internal thoughts, desires, dreams, struggles, and beliefs are now consistently impacted by the truth of the gospel. We also give this good news to others, allowing us to view the world through the lens of the gospel. In other words, work, marriage, sin, social justice --- all of life --- is filtered through our understanding of how Jesus’ finished work applies to it.

GOSPEL FLUENCY

If the gospel transforms every aspect of our personal story, it will naturally become a part of the way we speak. We call this gospel fluency. The concept of gospel fluency is based on the premise that the elements of Jesus' life, death and resurrection would become as natural a part of our speech as our native language. It shows up as we talk with people, view their life circumstances through the lens of the gospel, and seamlessly share how the gospel is good news to their specific situation. When asked the question, "What does Jesus' death on the cross do for you today?" most people respond that his sacrifice pays the penalty for our sin. While true, this only scratches the surface of all that his death and resurrection accomplish. Here is a list of some effects that the gospel has on our daily lives. There may be some big words in this list, but they are biblical. The explanations will help you have a working understanding of how they impact life.

Justification (Romans 3:20-26; Galatians 2:16) - We are given the righteousness of Jesus and have his perfect standing with God. Our value doesn't come from who we are or what we do - it comes from Jesus.

Sanctification (Romans 8:9-11; 12:1-2) - Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, he sends the Holy Spirit to abide and lead believers. As we follow Jesus, the Holy Spirit transforms us more and more into the image of Jesus.

Reconciliation (Colossians 1:21-22) - We were once enemies of God through our sin, but Christ has brought us back into a right relationship with God. We can now mend broken relationships with those around us.

Adoption (Romans 8:12-17) - We have been adopted as sons and heirs of God. We are now cherished members of God's eternal family - the church.

New Creation (2 Corinthians 5:17-22) - We are made into a new creation: new heart, new mind, new desires. We are no longer controlled by our sinful desires or marked by our sinful past.

New Identity (Romans 8:1, 15-17) - We have been given a new identity in Jesus. We are no longer labeled by what we have done or by what has been done to us.

Freedom (Galatians 5:1, 13; Romans 8:1-4) - We were slaves to sin and idolatry, but by the grace of God, we've been completely freed. Jesus accomplished what the law, moralism, obedience, religion, and human effort could never do.

Eternity (Philippians 3:12-21; Revelation 20-22) - We have been given eternal life with God. We can experience all of life, the good and the bad, with hope in the knowledge that our future is secure and eternal.

Security (Galatians 3:6-9) - Our salvation is held eternally secure because God promised that he would save us, and then Jesus accomplished that salvation on the cross. Salvation begins and ends with God. No amount of money, success, or titles on earth will provide that security.

Provision (2 Corinthians 8:9) - Jesus provides our greatest need of rescue by dying on the cross. We can trust him all the more to provide for our basic needs of water, food, shelter, clothing, etc.

Justice (Romans 3:21-26) - God's ultimate justice is satisfied by Jesus on the cross - all sin is paid for. We never have to seek vengeance when we've been wronged. All sin will be paid for either by sinners or by Jesus.

Mission (John 3:16; Matthew 28:18-20) - Jesus rescues a people from their sin and sends them out to declare this good news as his church. The mission of Jesus gives purpose to every aspect of our lives as we seek to share this good news and make disciples.

SO HOW DO WE DO THIS?

"Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving" (Colossians 2:6-7). To be rooted, built up, and established in the faith, we must continually return to the source of our initial understanding to learn: the Bible. Everything we need to confidently follow Jesus is found in the pages of Scripture. And even more, we should be consistently reading the Bible, not just for the sake of learning information, but to enjoy the relationship with God that has been purchased for us by Jesus.

DISCUSSION:

We want to give good news before good advice; let's take a second to put this into practice. Tom is in love with Michelle, but she treats him terribly. His whole life seems to ebb and flow with how their relationship is going. When things are good - he's on top of the world. When things are bad - he can hardly get out of bed. If Tom were in your group what would be some good advice that you might give him? Now, how is the gospel good news for Tom?

Before becoming a Christian, what was your understanding of what a mature Christian looked like? If maturity comes through understanding the gospel, how does that change your thinking?

Take one of the terms listed above and apply it to a specific area of your life. How is the gospel good news in this area?

THAT'S WHY WE:

- Give good news before giving good advice.
- Point people to the gospel instead of just modifying their behavior.
- Read the Bible and study the practical effects of the gospel in order to grow toward maturity.
- Care about understanding how the gospel applies to normal life (marriage, work, relationships, etc.).

PRAYER APPLICATION:

Psalms 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. The entire chapter is dedicated to the praise of God for his inspired Word given to man. It would be a good exercise to read through the entire chapter to gain an understanding of all the ways we should be grateful for the Bible. Right now, read verses 105-112 aloud. Make the words of each verse your own as you thank God for the Bible.

SECTION 3: COLOSSIANS 2:8-15

As you read through the next section of Colossians, use the following questions to help you understand the main ideas of the passage.

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WHERE DO I NEED TO REPENT?

What does it say I need to do? What does it say that I shouldn't do? Where does it expose my lack of faith? Where does the passage disagree with my beliefs/behaviors?

WHAT SHOULD I BE THANKFUL FOR?

What did I learn about God that was new or beautiful? How can I celebrate because of this?

HOW SHOULD I RESPOND?

What should I be praying about? What do I need to do?

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

COLOSSIANS 2:8-15

BIG IDEA: BIBLE READING CONNECTS CHRISTIANS TO CHRIST AND GUARDS US AGAINST OUR THREE ENEMIES - THE FLESH, THE WORLD, AND THE DEVIL.

The Bible repeatedly points to a spiritual reality beyond what can be perceived by our five senses. As Christians, we believe that there is more to the world than what meets the eye. We know that there is a God who has created everything and is actively involved in his creation. We believe that his creation was led astray by Satan, God's enemy. Humanity and all of creation have fallen into sin and are caught in the middle of a spiritual war between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness.

The Bible is clear that there is a real enemy and a real war going on over the eternal souls of humanity.

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

(Ephesians 6:10-12)

"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."

(1 Peter 5:8)

"Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs."

(2 Corinthians 2:10-11)

ROOTED IN JESUS

Paul calls for Christians to be *"rooted and built up in [Jesus]"* and to be *"established in the faith."*

This is an absolute necessity for a life of following Jesus. Paul makes clear in this section of Colossians that all wisdom, mystery, knowledge, depth, and fullness are found in Christ. We must have a regular, intentional process for growing in our knowledge of Jesus, his work, his attributes, and his will for our lives. The primary way this is done is through reading our Bibles. For Christians, there is simply no replacement for regular, intentional Bible reading and prayer. This can be done in the morning, at night, on a lunch break, privately, or with church family - it can be done through any number of approaches, but it cannot be replaced. Health and joy as a Christian are dependent on consistently pursuing time with Jesus.

THE POWER OF CHRIST

In Colossians, Paul is instructing the church to be rooted and grounded in Jesus: *"See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ."* He wants the church to be solely focused on Christ so that whether human or spiritual forces try to lead them astray, they will stand firm. They won't be "taken captive" by lies and appealing philosophies of the world that don't point

to Jesus. Paul also indicates that the Colossian church does not need to fear these spiritual powers: *“For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.”* Jesus is bigger than and ruler over all reality - physical and spiritual. Christians do not have to be in fear over unknown or unseen spiritual realities because of the power of Christ, displayed in his victory on the cross.

Paul continues by pointing to the forgiveness of sins through Jesus' work on the cross, showing that Satan has no claim or hold over us. We are no longer able to be accused of wrong because Jesus has paid our debt. *“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”* Satan has been disarmed because we have been forgiven.

A DAILY PRAYER

The way that Jesus teaches his disciples to pray also points to this reality being a regular, everyday part of the Christian experience. In Matthew 6, Jesus teaches his followers to pray this, *“...forgive us our sins, as we also have forgiven those who've sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”* Jesus here indicates that we have three enemies: our flesh, the world, and Satan.

As Christians, we should actively pray about all three on a routine basis. We should repent of our sin and take personal responsibility for our choices. We should ask God to keep us from being tempted to sin or as Paul says it, being taken captive by the world's approach to life. Finally, we should actively pray that God would powerfully deliver us from the work of Satan.

DISCUSSION:

The spiritual world discussed here is a reality. How difficult is it for you to believe or see this as reality? What has been your approach/interaction with spirituality in the past?

What does Bible reading look like for you currently? What are the hindrances you've found to reading the Bible? What needs to happen for Bible reading to become a normal part of your life?

In your prayer life, are you most likely to repent of your own sinfulness, pray for protection from the temptations around you, or pray against Satan and his work in the world? Are there any you completely ignore? Why do you think that is?

THIS IS WHY WE:

- Have an intentional counseling process for those struggling with primarily spiritual issues.
- Treat everyone in counseling like a complete person with the potential for mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual struggles.
- Are willing to openly speak about Satan and demons, while always keeping the focus squarely on Jesus.

PRAYER APPLICATION:

Spend some time praying about all three areas and seeking to grow in your realistic approach to the spiritual world around us.

SECTION 4: COLOSSIANS 2:16-23

As you read through the next section of Colossians, use the following questions to help you understand the main ideas of the passage.

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WHERE DO I NEED TO REPENT?

What does it say I need to do? What does it say that I shouldn't do? Where does it expose my lack of faith? Where does the passage disagree with my beliefs/behaviors?

WHAT SHOULD I BE THANKFUL FOR?

What did I learn about God that was new or beautiful? How can I celebrate because of this?

HOW SHOULD I RESPOND?

What should I be praying about? What do I need to do?

LAW VS GOSPEL

COLOSSIANS 2:16-23

BIG IDEA: WHEN RULES ARE THE STANDARD, THERE CAN ONLY BE TWO RESPONSES - RELIGION AND REBELLION. NEITHER OF THESE APPROACHES IS SUFFICIENT, BUT THE GOSPEL IS.

RELIGION

Humans can easily understand religion, which is why so many of us tend toward this end of the spectrum. The concepts are simple - do these things, don't do those things, and God will love you. This is what Paul is talking about when he refers to festivals, new moons, and sabbaths. While the term religion is often used as a generic term to describe belief systems, it focuses on humanity's actions to earn God's love. Christianity is a religion in the most generic use of the term, but its foundation is not what we do for God. It's about what God's done for us. As a part of Mill City Church, you will most often hear the term "religion" used to describe any works based belief system that runs contrary to the gospel.

Religion sells us the idea that our salvation is ultimately up to us and our ability to follow the rules. It basically boils down to an exchange of services. We provide good works for God, and he provides salvation for us. The problem is that the God of the Bible has unattainably high standards. Just take a quick tour of the early books of the Bible and you'll see that the rules he issued to the Israelites were impossible to follow even for the morally elite. His law was never meant to provide a path to eternal life, but to show us how morally bankrupt we really are. It was *"a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ."* Religion has no power to forgive sin, only Jesus does.

Christians believe that we do not have to obey all the ceremonial and social laws of the Old Testament, but many people buy into a more sneaky, modern version of religion. One common version of religion looks like going to church every Sunday, serving where you can, and following all the rules to fit into "Christian culture" thinking your actions justify you. This is why religion is so dangerous. We can do all the right things, but if we do them because we think we can put God in our debt or use our good works to make him love us, then we've missed the point altogether.

Religion can also take the form of Jesus plus something (e.g. Jesus plus works or Jesus plus morality), which is what Paul speaks against in verses 16 through 18. Christianity is all about Jesus - through him alone, the whole body grows. Many of us will buy into the lie that our behavior is what makes us ok, but ultimately all our value and worth are found in Jesus. He paid for them on the cross, and there is nothing we can do to improve on that.

REBELLION

On the other end of the spectrum are the rebels. They just read the section on religion and thought "Woohoo, there are no rules!" But if we look back at verses 11 and 12, we see that we are to *"put off the body of flesh,"* or turn away from our sinful ways. Being "buried with him in baptism" means that we are dead to our former lives and "raised with him through faith" to a new life which should be lived to glorify God.

Practically, rebellious people tend to believe that rules should only be followed if we can understand why they were written and if we deem that reason to be legitimate. We may have difficulty understanding why a loving God would fence off things that seem to make us happy, or command us to do things that seem to take away from our joy and fulfillment. What rebellious people often

fail to realize is that the dynamic between God and his people is much less like a Bible-thumping minister whose life goal is to keep the town free from dancing and rock & roll (a la Footloose) and much more like a father who won't let his two year old play with the steak knives. Rebellious people typically have a hard time following rules because they cannot understand the reason, but the cross definitively proves that God loves us enough to die for us and all his rules are for our good even when we can't see the reason for them. Once we begin to believe this truth, the response is joyful obedience.

While rebellion is typically more obvious than religion, it can be sneaky in its own way, too. Rebellion can be active, but it can also show up in the form of apathy. Actively pursuing sin is a form of rebellion, but failing to pursue holiness is as well. We are called to obey Christ out of a place of gratitude rather than obligation. When we truly realize that we are sinful but that Jesus has canceled "the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands," we are free to worship and follow him.

THE GOSPEL

We all have tendencies to lean toward religion or rebellion. Knowing which camp you're in is helpful for predicting sin patterns and struggles. It can also help you remember to make a conscious effort to understand people on the other side.

There are not good people and bad people; there are just bad people and Jesus. So whether you tend to cheapen the gospel by trying to earn your own salvation or turn your nose up at God by thinking you don't need a savior, the response is the same: realize that your need for Jesus is huge, and humbly press into his grace.

DISCUSSION:

What are some ways that people try to earn God's approval/love? How has this shown up in your own life and understanding of how you're supposed to relate to God?

What are some ways that you rebel against God? Where do you see patterns of rebellion (either active or passive) in your own life?

How does the truth of God's love for you counteract either your desire/tendency for religion or rebellion?

THIS IS WHY WE:

- Intentionally acknowledge the difference between religion, rebellion, and the gospel.
- Focus on God's grace at work in our behavior, rather than treating our behavior as primary.
- Repent of sin and point to Jesus as the answer to both our bad deeds and our good deeds done with the wrong motivation (earn something from God, prove I'm a good person, etc.).

PRAYER APPLICATION:

If you see yourself tending toward religion, pray that Jesus would change your heart to believe that he is all you need. Pray that he would show you where religion creeps into your life and how everything you are trying to earn has already been given to you fully, completely, and forever. Pray that he would teach you to live in freedom in light of the gospel.

If you see yourself tending toward rebellion, pray that Jesus would overwhelm you with grace. Pray that you would clearly see him on the cross and be reminded of what he did to rescue you from active rebellion. Ask him to reveal to you areas where you are apathetic and give you the desire to do the things he has commanded of you.

SECTION 5: COLOSSIANS 3:1-10

As you read through the next section of Colossians, use the following questions to help you understand the main ideas of the passage.

WHAT IS THE PASSAGE SAYING?

What was the main point? What was confusing? What words should I look up? Do I understand this? How would I explain it to a 10 year old?

WHERE DO I NEED TO REPENT?

What does it say I need to do? What does it say that I shouldn't do? Where does it expose my lack of faith? Where does the passage disagree with my beliefs/behaviors?

WHAT SHOULD I BE THANKFUL FOR?

What did I learn about God that was new or beautiful? How can I celebrate because of this?

HOW SHOULD I RESPOND?

What should I be praying about? What do I need to do?

REPENTANCE, CONFESSION, OBEDIENCE

COLOSSIANS 3:1-10

BIG IDEA: AS NEW CREATIONS IN CHRIST, CHRISTIANS SPEND THEIR LIVES FIGHTING SIN.

HIDDEN WITH CHRIST

Paul begins this chapter with the gospel, *“If you have been raised with Christ”* (Colossians 3:1). He reminds them that Jesus has conquered death through the resurrection, which you have taken part in by surrendering to him. You are now a new person because of the gospel. It is easy for us to forget this truth when we are at our worst. We think of God like we do other people, and we believe the lie that when we sin against him and others that he doesn’t want anything to do with us. That is how many of our relationships work with others, but that is not how God relates to his children. When we believe the gospel, we die to sin and are raised to a new life in Christ, which is forever hidden in the presence of God (Colossians 3:3). Therefore, in our low moments: when we look at pornography, talk badly about another member of our Community Group behind their back, or relapse into an old drug habit, our standing does not change with God because we are forever hidden in Christ.

SETTING YOUR MIND ON THINGS ABOVE, NOT THINGS ON EARTH

The Christian life is a life of repentance. A major aspect of repentance is recognizing the patterns of sin we live in as well as the indwelling sin and idolatry that creates those patterns. Repentance simply means to turn from sin, and you can’t turn from sin if you don’t recognize it. In Paul’s letters, we see a growing trend of how he recognizes his own sin. In his earlier letters, he confesses that he is the least of the apostles (1 Corinthians 15:9). In one of his later letters, he confesses that he is the least of Christians (Ephesians 3:8). In one of his final letters, he calls himself the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). Did Paul become more sinful as he grew in his relationship with God? No, he was certainly growing in his faith. However, Paul recognized the depths of his sin as he grew to know more of Jesus and of himself. Paul lists a pattern of sins which we must fight against - *“sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry...anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk.”* These are common patterns of sin in our lives.

PUTTING SIN TO DEATH

“Put to death therefore what is earthly in you” (Colossians 3:5). That is an intense word picture of putting sin to death because that is how seriously God views sin. Sin robs us of joy. It separates billions of people from a relationship with God. It separates us from one another. It’s a big deal. Paul says put sin to death - your sin needs to be sentenced to an execution. It should be beheaded or walked solemnly to the gallows. This is how serious sin is. Either you kill it or it kills you. There is no third option. So we need to take the call to put sin to death seriously, but how do we do it?

Another big part of repentance is confession and openness. Paul assumes that everyone in the church is wrestling with these sins (we learned that above), so we need to be honest with God and others about these struggles. 1 John 1:7 says: *“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”* This passage calls us to bring our sin out of darkness and into the light, and when we do this, we can have true fellowship with one another. God wants us to confess our sin in community, and as a church, we do this in Community Groups. We can be honest about our sin because all of us are going through the same struggles and all of us are hidden in Christ.

The beauty of walking in the light together is that openness breeds openness- meaning, the more you are open with your struggles and sin, the more others will be too. There will always be the temptation to hide or as it says in v. 9 *“lie to one another”*, but these are our old ways, the ways that robbed us of the joy that we have with Jesus and one another. And as we do this together, we can then encourage one another to replace our old ways with kindness, humility, patience, and other virtues that Paul tells us to “put on”. These are the practices that increase our joy in Christ and help us flourish as a church family.

DISCUSSION:

When you are at your best (reading your Bible, not missing any Community Group meetings or Sunday Gatherings, praying, being generous, etc.), how do you think God views you? When you are at your worst, how do you think God views you? Do you believe there is a difference between how God views you at your best and at your worst. If so, why?

When you read the list of sins that Paul mentions in Colossians, do you recognize some patterns of sin in your own life? If nothing came to mind, is it possible that you are blind to some of the sin in your life?

Have you ever confessed your sin before? Have you confessed the sins that were discussed above? What makes being fully open and fully known by your Community Group difficult? How does the good news of the gospel overcome these hindrances?

THIS IS WHY WE:

- Practice transparency through open confession and repentance in Community Groups.
- Practice church discipline (Matthew 18), where we intentionally fight against sin and for holiness in our lives.
- Believe that repentance is an active part of the Christian life and a celebration of the God’s grace towards us.

PRAYER APPLICATION:

Spend some time praying that God would reveal areas of sin in your life. Write down whatever you think. Prayerfully repent, ask for forgiveness, and celebrate the life you now have through Christ’s work on your behalf.

SECTION 6: COLOSSIANS 3:11-17

As you read through the next section of Colossians, use the following questions to help you understand the main ideas of the passage.

WHAT IS THE PASSAGE SAYING?

What was the main point? What was confusing? What words should I look up? Do I understand this? How would I explain it to a 10 year old?

WHERE DO I NEED TO REPENT?

What does it say I need to do? What does it say that I shouldn't do? Where does it expose my lack of faith? Where does the passage disagree with my beliefs/behaviors?

WHAT SHOULD I BE THANKFUL FOR?

What did I learn about God that was new or beautiful? How can I celebrate because of this?

HOW SHOULD I RESPOND?

What should I be praying about? What do I need to do?

FAMILY

COLOSSIANS 3:11-17

BIG IDEA: JESUS BRINGS US TOGETHER INTO A NEW ETERNAL FAMILY. WHAT NOW UNITES US IS WAY BIGGER THAN ANY OF THE THINGS THAT USED TO SEPARATE US.

The picture most often used to describe the Church in the New Testament is family. In Christ, the Church is not like a family - we are a family. We realize that some people have lousy families, but Jesus redeems that earthly picture. He gives us new brothers and sisters and a new heavenly Father. One of the most beautiful things about Christ's family is that it has members from every nationality, culture, race, gender, language, political association, and socioeconomic class. It has members from every corner of the earth and every walk of life. Because Christ is in all believers, there is no more division (Colossians 3:11).

You may have noticed that our Community Groups are not affinity-based, meaning we do not have singles groups or young married couples groups or groups for people with kids. We believe that the thing that makes us family (Christ in us) is way bigger than any of the things that used to separate us, so we intentionally invest in the lives of people who are not necessarily exactly like us.

God has instructions for how members of his family should treat each other. In fact, much of the New Testament was written to teach us how to follow Jesus in the context of family. These instructions, which we commonly refer to as "one anothers," are scattered throughout the New Testament. The most common is "*love one another*," as in verse 14 - "*put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony*." Really, all the rest of the one anothers flow out of this one. Members of God's family should treat each other with compassion and patience, "*bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other*."

FIGHT LIKE FAMILY

When Paul talks about "*bearing with one another*," he basically means putting up with each other. Being family requires having patience for the little quirks and annoying habits of your brothers and sisters. It means that even though you might not always get along, you are always there for each other. Bearing with one another essentially equates to being patient with others.

Forgiving each other takes it one step further. Forgiveness comes into play when you simply cannot forbear any longer. In this part of the command, Paul is telling believers what to do if one has a legitimate complaint against another. In our church, we fight for an environment where you can actually tell someone when they've wronged you so there can be actual forgiveness and reconciliation. Just like a family, we want our members to be committed enough to one another to be able to confront wrongdoing without fear of fracturing the relationship. In Christ, you can tell your brother or sister how they have wronged you and forgive them fully and freely. Our sin no longer has to separate us because the gospel is true.

At some point, you're going to be upset, frustrated, or hurt by someone in your Community Group. When that happens, you basically have three options: have a conversation that leads to forgiveness, leave, or just live with the crushing awkwardness. We're going to fight for the first option every time. The first option is the only one where we really get to grow and display the gospel - that Jesus pays for sin and gives us the ability to forgive and reconcile. Practically, that means that if you have an issue with someone in our church family, you go talk to them. If you know someone has an issue

with you, you go talk to them. And, if a member of our church family comes to you with a complaint about someone else, your first question will be “what did they say when you talked to them about this?”

COMMUNITY

In verse 16, Paul is saying we should know the word of Christ, which we accomplish by studying the Bible. We should know it so well that it dwells in us richly and overflows into teaching and admonishing (which means correcting) one another in wisdom. We can only live this out in the context of community and by being around each other in the normal rhythms of life.

For living as gospel-centered communities on mission, there are some core expectations:

- **Be Around** - Spend time together, both during weekly group meeting times and in the everyday rhythms of life. That means eating meals together, going bowling, playing sports, shopping together, etc.
- **Be Invested** - Know what’s going on in the lives of other group members. Be intentional about building each other up. Laugh, mourn, cry, celebrate, and rejoice together.
- **Be Unique** - Be you. We don’t want all of our Community Groups to look the same. God has made us all with unique personalities, abilities, and talents. You get to just be you in love with Jesus and his family.
- **Be Mundane and Spectacular** - Group members care for each other, share life, love like family, confess sin to one another, point each other to Jesus, invite others in, welcome new people, and join together on mission. All of this is a spectacular representation of the gospel and happens in the midst of the mundane parts of normal, everyday life.

DISCUSSION:

How does your earthly family affect how you view your Community Group as a family? How does the Bible redeem this picture?

Before you became a Christian, how did you respond when you had conflict with another person? What is the biggest hurdle you face when you know you need to speak with someone about how you’ve hurt them or how they’ve hurt you?

How does this passage inform how we should handle that type of conflict within the church?

THIS IS WHY WE:

- Refuse to allow relationship drama and difficulty to tear us apart.
- Intentionally try to spend time with each other doing normal life stuff (shopping, cleaning, folding clothes, etc.).
- Try to spend holidays together, have groups that aren’t age or gender specific, and actively celebrate singleness as a healthy, normal way to join in family life with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

PRAYER APPLICATION:

Write out all the people in your Community Group and pray for them.

SECTION 7: COLOSSIANS 3:18-4:1

As you read through the next section of Colossians, use the following questions to help you understand the main ideas of the passage.

WHAT IS THE PASSAGE SAYING?

What was the main point? What was confusing? What words should I look up? Do I understand this? How would I explain it to a 10 year old?

WHERE DO I NEED TO REPENT?

What does it say I need to do? What does it say that I shouldn't do? Where does it expose my lack of faith? Where does the passage disagree with my beliefs/behaviors?

WHAT SHOULD I BE THANKFUL FOR?

What did I learn about God that was new or beautiful? How can I celebrate because of this?

HOW SHOULD I RESPOND?

What should I be praying about? What do I need to do?

EVERYDAY DISCIPLESHIP

COLOSSIANS 3:18-4:1

BIG IDEA: BEING A CHRISTIAN AFFECTS ALL ASPECTS OF OUR DAILY LIVES.

Paul finishes out chapter three (Colossians 3:18-4:1) with instructions for how wives, husbands, children, servants, and masters should act. (The closest thing we have to “bondservants” and “masters” today are employees and bosses). How do these instructions about relationships impact our understanding of following Jesus in our daily lives? What is Paul’s point? Simply put, your Christianity now affects all of life. Whether your main interaction is with your spouse, your parents, your children, your boss, or your employees - being a Christ follower now has drastic effects on your attitude and your purpose behind all of these roles.

WIVES, SUBMIT TO YOUR HUSBANDS

The biblical structure for marriage is to have one man and one wife in a lifelong covenant where the husband lovingly and sacrificially leads, provides, and protects while the wife uses the fullest extent of her gifting, intelligence, and strength for the good of the family with a posture of respect and submission towards her husband (Genesis 1, 1 Peter 3:1-6, Ephesians 5:22-33, Proverbs 31). Paul here specifically calls wives to this posture of submission. This is difficult and countercultural but has nothing to do with value, intelligence, or worth. Wives actively choosing to submit to the leadership of their husbands when there are strong disagreements is ultimately an act of worship to Christ. This type of submission is only possible through a faith in Jesus that sees him as over and above their husbands. This command gives married couples a functional way out of disagreements. It keeps disagreements from becoming marital trainwrecks and continually puts the weight on the husband rather than letting him shirk his responsibilities and place the weight of leadership on his wife’s shoulders. Christian wives are called to submit to their husbands in a manner similar to their submitting to the Lord.

HUSBANDS, LOVE YOUR WIVES

Throughout scripture (Ephesians 5:25-33, 1 Peter 3:7), husbands are called to love their wives. They are to care for them and make decisions out of what is best for their wives, not what is best for themselves. In Ephesians, Paul expands this idea by stating that husbands should “*love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her.*” Christian husbands are to be sacrificial, leading through serving their families. This means that as a Christian husband “What do I want?” and “What is easiest/best for me?” has been replaced by “What is best for my family?” Christians husbands are to give up their preferences for the good of their wives and to be willing to lead through difficult disagreements with their spouses towards what they prayerfully see as the most faithful, godly decision before them. Christian husbands are also specifically told to not be harsh with their wives. Domineering, aggressive behavior is not acceptable. Husbands should be gracious and caring towards their wives. They should live with a humble attitude of service and love - the same attitude Christ has towards his people.

CHILDREN, OBEY YOUR PARENTS

Christian children should live in obedience towards their parents. As children grow into adulthood, this obedience turns to respect and honor, but children of all ages should treat their parents well.

FATHERS, DO NOT PROVOKE YOUR CHILDREN

When the Bible speaks of parenting, it often addresses fathers (Ephesians 6:4). This is not to lower the importance of mothers, but simply to highlight the weight of leadership carried by fathers in the tone and structure of raising children. Specifically, fathers are instructed here to not provoke their children. Proper parenting involves discipline and consistency. Provoking a reaction from your children - antagonizing or intentionally angering them - leads to one of two outcomes: you either have to discipline your child due to provocation, or you choose to not discipline them and reinforce bad behavior. Either way, it is inappropriate because you are eliciting a sinful response from your children.

BONDSERVANTS

Christians are supposed to work hard. Our work is not simply for our employer's benefit. We ultimately serve God. Therefore it does not matter who your boss is or how they treat you. As a Christian, your work ethic should look the same regardless of the environment in which you find yourself. God certainly promises to provide for his people, but he often does this through the normal labor of farmers, truck drivers, and grocery store clerks. All honest labor is work in God's service and should not be done well only when we're being watched, but should be attended to with genuine effort at all times. This is how Christians ought to work.

MASTERS

Just as there is a distinct way to work as a Christian, there is also a distinct way in which Christians should lead and manage others. Christian managers, supervisors, and employers should be just and fair, seeking the well-being of those they oversee rather than simply their own benefit. Just as fathers should lead by serving in the home, those in leadership positions in the workplace should approach their position with the same humility.

ALL OF LIFE

There is not an area of life untouched by the kingship of Jesus. He now affects everything. As we begin to see all of life through the lens of the gospel, our interactions, purposes, and daily lives change. Christians are called to live out their faith in all of life. In his book "Unfinished," Richard Stearns puts it this way:

"So we need to dispense with any notion that we can take this Jesus on our own terms, that we can simply add him to the structure of our lives, fit him into our plans, worship him once a week for an hour or so, and offer him a prayer when we find ourselves needing something. No, Jesus demands the total commitment of our lives in his service. We are called to enlist in his army and lay down every other priority in our lives at his feet. Our ambitions, our careers, our relationships, our possessions, even our families must be laid at his feet to do with as he wishes."

Our lives should be filled with opportunities for us to continue to grow as disciples of Jesus. There will be moments when we are forced to choose between our old desires and motivations and our new life in Christ. We get to see our faith begin to work itself out in our normal lives. We can trust that God's call on our lives to be good husbands, wives, children, bosses, workers, etc. is for our good and his glory. Our growth in following Jesus begins at home - how we organize our time and interact with those with whom we share a roof. As wives, husbands, children, and roommates, we begin to work out our faith in our relationships. We can begin to live in a way that may seem backwards to our society - wives submitting to their husbands, children obeying their parents (even as they grow older), working hard with a good attitude for a demeaning boss - but we've been given the bigger picture and saved by Christ from our sin and called into the good life.

DISCUSSION:

In which role do you see yourself most? How does this passage directly address you?

How should some of your home or work interactions change because you are a Christian?

How might seeing your daily work as “serving the Lord Christ” change your approach to it?

THIS IS WHY WE:

- Seek to understand and discuss how the gospel applies to normal life.
- Believe that all of the ordinary parts of our lives are significant opportunities for growth and worship.
- Believe that how we act in normal aspects of our lives serves as an example of our faith in - Christ and often mirrors his goodness towards us in the gospel (i.e. generosity, faithfulness, sacrifice, humility, forgiveness).

PRAY APPLICATION:

Take a few minutes and pray over each of these roles that fits you. Pray specifically what the passage states, asking God to help you in your efforts to follow him.

SECTION 8: COLOSSIANS 4:2-6

As you read through the next section of Colossians, use the following questions to help you understand the main ideas of the passage.

WHAT IS THE PASSAGE SAYING?

What was the main point? What was confusing? What words should I look up? Do I understand this? How would I explain it to a 10 year old?

WHERE DO I NEED TO REPENT?

What does it say I need to do? What does it say that I shouldn't do? Where does it expose my lack of faith? Where does the passage disagree with my beliefs/behaviors?

WHAT SHOULD I BE THANKFUL FOR?

What did I learn about God that was new or beautiful? How can I celebrate because of this?

HOW SHOULD I RESPOND?

What should I be praying about? What do I need to do?

EVERYDAY MISSION

COLOSSIANS 4:2-4:6

BIG IDEA: WE ARE MEANT TO USE OUR EVERYDAY LIVES TO SEE MORE PEOPLE BECOME CHRISTIANS.

As Paul continues the letter in 4:2-6, we see that the purpose behind our ordinary, everyday lives is to see the gospel advance in the lives of those around us. Your life is a gospel presentation. The way we treat our children, our roommates, and our coworkers should point to an explanation deeply rooted in the way our lives have been changed by Jesus. Everything now has a greater depth and meaning behind it. Our ordinary lives are not insignificant because they are put to work for the sake of the good news of Jesus. There is no such thing as an ordinary follower of Christ with an ordinary life; every Christian has been called into more. Jesus' mission is to reconcile the world to himself and he's chosen the church to accomplish this task. The church is plan A. There is no plan B.

In this section of Colossians, Paul shows us four ways to leverage our lives as a tool for mission: pray, declare, walk, & answer.

PRAY

"Continue steadfastly in prayer....that God may open a door for the word" (Colossians 4:2-3). We should consistently and intentionally pray that God would open up opportunities for us to share the gospel with others. Only God saves, and only God equips you to serve, love, and share the gospel with others. God is the only one who can give the gift of faith, convict us of sin, and lead us to repentance. He cares more about those around you than you do. First and foremost, we pray, pray, pray.

DECLARE

"...God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ ... that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak" (Colossians 4:3-4). The gospel is first and foremost news. It's the good news about what Jesus has done for us on the cross through his death and resurrection. It's news about how God saves sinners from destruction. Since it's news, it must be shared. We have to declare it - say it out loud to others. Paul says that we should use the Bible (word) to explain the gospel (mystery of Christ) and that we should be prepared to do this clearly.

The gospel is the good news that Jesus did not leave us in our sin. One way to think about it is through the process of Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration. Creation - we were created by God to exist in a relationship with him. Everything was originally good. Fall - Humanity rebelled against God with a desire to rule over their own lives. Sin and death entered the world. Redemption - Jesus joined humanity and lived a sinless life, died a sacrificial death, and rose from the dead to atone for humanity's sin. Restoration - all who have placed their faith in Jesus will have our intended relationship with God restored and spend eternity in heaven with him.

Because this is the story of the world, we all have a smaller version of this story playing out in our lives all the time. As you get acquainted with someone, you can begin listening for traces of this larger story in their personal one.

CREATION - What is my Identity? (Sense of Purpose, Significance, Security, Acceptance, Power)

FALL - What is my Problem? (Keeping me from being or doing what I should? What would be the worst version of my life? What is my Functional Hell?)

REDEMPTION - What is my Solution? (Who or what will save me from my problem? What is my Functional Savior?)

RESTORATION - What is my Hope? (What should my world look like if it was as it ought to be? What is my Functional Heaven?)

Example: You are getting to know your coworker Cam over lunch in the breakroom. He says, “We just grew up so poor, you know? I’ve never wanted my kids to be poor like we were. That’s why I’m working here. I hate this place, but the pay’s good. I figure about 20 years here and I’ll be able to retire and my kids can have all the stuff I never had.”

Think about Cam’s story using the Creation - Fall - Redemption - Restoration framework. How does the gospel intersect with Cam’s story? How might you begin to help him see this?

WALK

“Walk in wisdom towards outsiders, making the best use of the time.” Paul says for us to live our lives intentionally around those who do not know Jesus, wisely using our time to this end. Often as Americans, our goal is to have a nice home that is a haven from the rest of the world - a place where we can relax and get away from everyone and everything. Paul turns this on its head. In verses 3:18-25 and then into this section, Paul is saying that our homes and our time begin to be used as tools for mission. Making the “best use of the time” might mean eating lunch in the break room in order to get to know your coworkers. It might mean joining the Homeowners Association, neighborhood watch, or PTA. It might look like taking walks every evening, praying that God will give you the chance to meet your neighbors and invite them over for dinner sometime. It could be joining a rec league softball team or coaching your daughter in tee-ball. All of these normal activities become prayer-drenched intentional uses of time to walk out the Christian life of service, hospitality, and love towards those outside the Church.

ANSWER

“Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” Paul is making the assumption that Christians live their lives intentionally around those who do not know Jesus and that your life will demand an answer. As people get to know us, our decisions, actions, and choices will have to be explained. Paul says to be “gracious and seasoned with salt” meaning that you should respond gently, but with truth. Paul assumes here that whatever was said to you that needs a response was not said in the nicest way. Your coworker may not ask “why are you always happy?” “How can you be so hopeful in this messed up world?”, but they might say “Did you just say that you think only married people should have sex...and only with each other?” “Oh, you’re a Christian? So you think gay people are all going to hell, huh?” - and in these times, it will not be enough for you to respond “the Bible says _____ is sin” or “the Bible says we should _____.” You’ll need to be prepared to show how the gospel affects your view on marriage, money, sex, work - you name it. This interaction Paul describes means a few things for us:

1. The gospel is actually having an effect on our lives.
2. The gospel is the reason for the change in our lives (I’m generous because Jesus was generous towards me, not just I’m generous because the Bible says to be).
3. We are around people who aren’t Christians as genuine friends so they hear our thought

processes and see our choices and actions.

DISCUSSION:

What does a normal week look like for you? Who are you around the most?

PRAY: What interactions in life could you begin asking God to open up opportunities for you to share the gospel? (Work, School, Neighborhood, etc.) What specifically would you like to see God do?

DECLARE: If you had a friend ask you about the gospel and what you believe, what would you tell them?

Take a second to discuss how you thought through the example of Cam's story listed above.

WALK: In what ways can you begin being intentional with what you are already doing? What should be cut from your schedule because it isn't a "best use of the time"? What should be added?

ANSWER: What has changed about your life because you are following Jesus now? Using the gospel, how would you explain this change to someone who challenged you?

THIS IS WHY WE:

- See every aspect of life as an opportunity for mission (our homes, our jobs, our hobbies, etc.).
- Intentionally go out of our way to get to know the people who are already around us in everyday life with gospel intentionality.
- Pray regularly for the people around us - our opportunities to serve them or share the gospel with them.
- Try to grow in gospel fluency so that sharing the gospel comes naturally as we talk about our views on everyday stuff (money, relationships, marriage, politics, etc.).

PRAY APPLICATION:

Take a minute to list the people in your life that you know are not Christians. Spend some time praying for them - that God would open up opportunities for you to share the gospel and that you would spend your time wisely around them.

SECTION 9: COLOSSIANS 4:7-18

As you read through the next section of Colossians, use the following questions to help you understand the main ideas of the passage.

WHAT IS THE PASSAGE SAYING?

What was the main point? What was confusing? What words should I look up? Do I understand this? How would I explain it to a 10 year old?

WHERE DO I NEED TO REPENT?

What does it say I need to do? What does it say that I shouldn't do? Where does it expose my lack of faith? Where does the passage disagree with my beliefs/behaviors?

WHAT SHOULD I BE THANKFUL FOR?

What did I learn about God that was new or beautiful? How can I celebrate because of this?

HOW SHOULD I RESPOND?

What should I be praying about? What do I need to do?

GROUPS ON MISSION

COLOSSIANS 4:7-18

BIG IDEA: THE CHURCH IS A GROUP OF VERY DIFFERENT PEOPLE HELD TOGETHER BY THE ONE THING THEY HAVE IN COMMON: JESUS. WE WORK TOGETHER AS A COMMUNITY TO GROW AS DISCIPLES AND SEE MORE PEOPLE BECOME DISCIPLES.

TEAM SPORT

The first two chapters of Colossians clearly articulate the good news of the gospel - that through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we can be forgiven of our sins and have eternal life in Him (Colossians 1:13, 21-23). The final two chapters help us see how that truth practically applies to our personal lives, the church family we exist in, and the mission that we've been called into. Basically, a follower of Jesus will cultivate family relationships as they pursue sharing the gospel with people in their spheres of influence: school, work, neighborhood, homes, and community.

The interesting part of these concluding verses is the number of people who are mentioned by name and the vast differences that they have with each other. In this passage, we see Jews and Gentiles, males and females, doctors and servants, new believers and church planters, but notice the language Paul uses when addressing some of them: *"He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord."* (Colossians 4:7). *"...our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you."* (Colossians 4:9). *"...my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me."* (Colossians 4:11). Paul realizes that regardless of race, gender, background, socioeconomic status, or length of time following Jesus, all believers have been called to band together as fellow workers for the kingdom of God to see more people become Christians. He understands that the church is a group of very different people held together by the one thing they have in common: Jesus.

GO TOGETHER

The last address that Paul makes in this passage is directed to Archippus: *"see that you fulfill the ministry that you received in the Lord."* (Colossians 4:17). As a follower of Jesus, each one of us has a personal responsibility to be actively seeking to share the gospel with the people God has placed around us. A common mistake that Christians can make is thinking that being on mission is that you, as an individual, are solely responsible for reaching everyone around you as a renegade cowboy Christian. Thankfully, that's not the case. Jesus has given us each other - we have a team now. The church is God's means to save the world, and we are a body with different skill sets and opportunities. This is where our Community Groups come in. Community Groups allow us to approach building relationships together in much the same way that Jesus did. As we see opportunities in our everyday lives, we can invite others in our group to tag along. And as those relationships grow stronger with non-believers, you have an easy invite into the rhythms that your Community Group has already established.

We simply work together. You may find it very difficult to articulate the gospel well to others, but Tom is great at explaining the gospel in helpful ways in normal conversations. He's gifted here, maybe you aren't, but that does not remove you from the mission. Maybe you're great at meeting people and making new friends so you invite a few coworkers to a Fireflies game. Karen, another member of your Community Group, is shy, but she's a great listener who helps make everyone feel welcomed. So you get to invite, Karen gets to help people feel cared for, and Tom loves to tell people about Jesus in a way that regularly sees people become Christians. Here's the point: we aren't meant to

do mission alone. Our gifts are meant to complement each other as we reach out to our city as a community in the normal rhythms of life.

EVERYDAY LIFE

The call to share the gospel and see more people become Christians is not some sort of separated activity from your normal life. Our lives are not segmented into work, family, hobbies, church, and so forth; all areas of our lives now become opportunities to introduce people to Jesus. In this way, God is reaching many areas in our community that would not be reached by pastors or church staff, but are being reached by his everyday missionaries who get paid to haul trash, build doors, or file taxes. This means that it may not be necessary to add anything to your already busy life. You just have to begin to see that every part of your life is now an avenue for God's mission of redemption on earth. This mindset becomes your new lens for how you view your purpose in the world. It becomes the way you see yourself and every area of your life. You now approach life with a new and compelling purpose because you are a part of God's mission to save the world. You don't add mission to your life - life is now one big opportunity for discipleship and mission. And you get to do it with the family God has invited you into.

DISCUSSION:

Before becoming a Christian, how did you view having relationships with people who were different from you? How does the gospel impact how you view relationships now?

How are you gifted to help your group be on mission? How do you see different, yet complementary gifts in the other people in your group?

Who has God placed around you (work, school, neighborhood, family, friends) that needs to know Jesus? How can you invite your group to be a part of reaching them?

THIS IS WHY WE:

- Seek opportunities to invite other people from our Community Group to meet our friends and neighbors (i.e. I'm going to lunch with my neighbor so I invite two people from my CG).
- Have intentional rhythms in our Community Groups where we celebrate, party, and spend time in normal life together, giving us the opportunity to invite those around us.
- Each of our groups has a Group Strategy and specifically outlines who they are pursuing with the good news of the gospel and how they are going to be on mission together.

PRAY APPLICATION:

Pray by name for the people in your life who don't know Jesus.

Pray for the people in your Community Group.

Pray for opportunities for your Community Group to actively help you reach those people.

A LETTER FROM YOUR PASTORS & GROUPS TEAM

*Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who
keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.*
Revelation 14:12

We are honored and excited to be a part of your life with Christ. Following Jesus is difficult. As we encounter doubt, hardship, pain, loss, and trial, it is easy to slide away from reading our Bibles, praying, and pursuing relationships with our church family and with Jesus. A life of devotion to Jesus takes effort, discipline, and sacrifice. Jesus does not shy away from acknowledging this reality, *“Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?”* (Luke 14:27-28). Life in Christ takes courage and faithfulness. But let’s be clear about something: it’s worth it.

Everyone was designed to worship. We were created to spend our lives seeking, loving, celebrating, and pursuing what we hold as most dear and most valuable. And we become more and more like what we love. What we worship molds us. Those who love money, grow cold and calculating. Those whose love and faith is in personal relationships are molded by the person who has captivated their highest affection. As Christians, we become increasingly made into the image of Christ, our one true love who has captivated our highest affections. Your life from this point forward will change. Your actions, loves, desires, hopes, and dreams will change. As you begin to know and love Jesus more, as you become more and more captivated with his goodness, you will change. He will change you.

You’ll face setbacks. You may spend years battling the same sin. You may deal with depression and loss. In all of this, Christ is good. He is faithful, and he is worth it. Don’t quit. Continue to run the race marked out for you. Fix your eyes and your heart on Christ. Surround yourself with others who love him and spend your life seeking to grab hold of that which truly matters and truly lasts. As pastor and theologian John Piper has said, “God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in him.”

Put forth the energy to pursue Christ, to find your joy and satisfaction in him. Keep fighting. He’s worth it.

Grace and peace,

Your Pastors
& Groups Team