The Gospel’s Goal

Spiritual transformation is the goal of the gospel.

COLOSSIANS 1:24–2:3

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;
What are some qualities of a winning sports team? How do those qualities translate into the Christian life?

October marks the end of major league baseball season with the World Series in view. The common goal of winning a championship brings together a group of people and makes them a team. Spiritually, every believer should strive for a common goal: maturity. God wants us to become more like Him; it’s a goal He can help us reach.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The Colossians were under attack. The congregation was being introduced to new ideas about who Jesus was and the keys to spiritual maturity. Smooth-talking heretics had slipped into the crowd and shared “truths” that weren’t true at all.

Even though Paul was under house arrest in Rome, he refused to let false teachers take over the Colossian congregation. Though he probably had never met the Colossian Christians, he wrote a letter to remind them of the foundational truths of the gospel.

After a brief introduction, Paul jumped into the most essential truth of all—the person of Jesus Christ. While the false teachers said that Jesus had been a good man, they denied that He really was God. They believed He was among God’s highest creations but was created nonetheless.

For Paul, there was no room for doubt or skepticism. Jesus had proven that He is God and that He is the central figure in the gospel story. This was the truth that had led the Colossians into a personal relationship with God through Jesus, and this was the truth that Paul urged them to continue embracing.

Paul cared about these distant believers because he was a faithful minister of the gospel. He had suffered for the message of Christ and had dedicated his life to making sure that as many people as possible heard about Him. He longed to see believers grow in the faith and to become more like Jesus each day (Col. 1:24–2:3).

In contrast, the false teachers were threatening the spiritual health and growth of the Colossians. They were trying to take people captive through lies and deceptions (2:4-8). Repeating the truths about who Jesus is and what He did was the only way to derail the heretics’ mission.
COLOSSIANS 1:24–2:3

24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and I am completing in my flesh what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for his body, that is, the church. 25 I have become its servant, according to God’s commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, 26 the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. 27 God wanted to make known among the Gentiles the glorious wealth of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 We proclaim him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. 29 I labor for this, striving with his strength that works powerfully in me. . . .

1 For I want you to know how greatly I am struggling for you, for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me in person. 2 I want their hearts to be encouraged and joined together in love, so that they may have all the riches of complete understanding and have the knowledge of God’s mystery—Christ. 3 In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Passage Outline

Commit as a Messenger (Col. 1:24-27)
Focused on Maturity (Col. 1:28-29)
Concerned for the Faithful (Col. 2:1-3)

Key Words

A. Pointing at the church at Colossi, Paul was willing to suffer for the church.

B. Paul sought to share what Christ had begun as the Suffering Servant.

C. “Minister” (NASB, NKJV), the same word used to describe a deacon.

D. God “granted” (NASB) Paul this position; Paul didn’t earn it.

E. The plural “we” indicates Paul wasn’t the only proclaimer; we should proclaim Him too (1 Cor. 11:26).

F. In the Greek, it means to work to the point of exhaustion.

G. Paul’s fight and struggle to push forward was a continual action done in Christ’s strength.

H. Paul faithfully served the church from a heart of compassion.
EXPLORE THE TEXT

From his earliest days as a believer, Paul had experienced the dangers of taking a stand for the gospel. Jews were offended because the gospel included the Gentiles, and the Gentiles were threatened because the gospel diminished their pagan traditions. Still, the apostle stood strong. Even as he wrote this letter to the Colossians, he was living under house arrest in Rome. Paul did not take persecution personally. He knew he was being abused for the sake of Christ.

How does a person’s willingness to endure any challenge for the sake of the gospel impact those who hear the gospel as a result of that challenge?

**BIBLE SKILL: Look up cross-references for clarity.** Paul used the words “sufferings” (Col. 1:24) and “struggling” (Col. 2:1) to describe his missionary work. Review 2 Corinthians 11:23-33 and look up cross references identified in a study Bible. How do these verses affirm Paul’s description of his work in Colossians 1–2? How do his experiences emphasize his dependence on God in doing this work?

Paul recognized he was a servant of the church, working under God’s commission. He knew that everything he said and did had an impact on those under his care. So he wanted to be faithful to the charge the Lord had given him. Paul’s challenge was to share the truth of the gospel in every setting so every person would get the complete picture of what it means to follow Christ.

For Paul, the gospel wasn’t about keeping a set of rules and regulations; it was about Jesus. The apostle was determined to proclaim Him.

**How does the gospel empower a person to share the truth about Jesus? What are the consequences of delivering a message in our own strength?**

**KEY DOCTRINE: Evangelism and Missions.** It is the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations. (See Matt. 28:18-20.)

Having shared his overall passion for Christian maturity, Paul focused specifically on the believers in Colossae. He wasn’t just struggling for Christians in a larger sense. He was also pouring himself out for the Colossian congregation.

**How is Paul’s concern a demonstration of his maturity? Does a believer’s concern for others serve as an indicator of spiritual maturity? Explain.**

Spiritual maturity doesn’t just happen; it is nurtured. Paul wanted to play a role in the Colossians’ development as believers. He longed for them to be encouraged in the truth of the gospel. The Greek word conveys the idea of strength to stand up for what is right. It also refers to something required at that moment. The Colossians needed help to stand strong in the face of meddling false teachers.
APPLY THE TEXT

- God works through the lives of His followers to make the gospel known.
- Believers deliver God’s message in His strength so others can grow spiritually.
- Believers demonstrate maturity by encouraging faithfulness in others.

To whom are you being sent to share the gospel? To what lengths are you willing to go to complete that task? What is your next step in sharing with that person or group?

Evaluate your level of trust in God in delivering the gospel to others. In what areas do you need to depend upon God more fully?

Discuss as a group ways of encouraging others to grow spiritually. How can the group show a greater concern for all people?

Prayer Requests
Day 1: Challenges arise in spreading the gospel.

*Read Colossians 1:24, reflecting on Paul’s sufferings.*

Paul understood he could *rejoice* in his *sufferings* because they had a positive impact on others. Through his pain, he was blessing the *church*. He depended on the Savior more and more as he endured the struggles. His suffering also encouraged others to take a bolder stand for Christ. (See Phil. 1:12-14.) The key question in this passage is what Paul meant by completing *what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for his body*. At first glance, it might seem that he meant the sufferings of Christ were not sufficient for the salvation of the lost, and that Paul’s sufferings had somehow made up a lack in Christ’s redeeming work. However, Paul had just declared that through the blood of His cross, Christ achieved God’s good pleasure of reconciling everything to Himself by making peace. (See 1:20.) We can eliminate any idea that Paul meant that his own sufferings had redeeming value. His afflictions were not for supplying some lack in salvation’s provision but were for advancing the gospel. It is quite possible Paul recognized that not every genuinely redeemed individual was willing to suffer for the sake of the gospel. Thus, there was a deficiency in the amount of suffering others had been willing to undergo in order to bring the saving message of the gospel to all people in all places. Paul determined he would go the second mile in risking his life to reduce that deficit by willingly suffering more than the average person.

**How would your willingness to endure any challenge for the sake of the gospel impact those who hear the gospel as a result of that challenge?**

Day 2: We are assured of Christ’s presence.

*Read Colossians 1:25-27, identifying the mystery Paul describes.*

God initially revealed His plan to His chosen people, the Jews. While they tended to expect special privileges in God’s kingdom as a result, His offer of salvation is for all people. In other words, *the Gentiles* were part of God’s plan from the beginning. God wanted them in on the mystery. That’s what Paul’s commission was all about. Paul reminded the Colossians that Christ had lived *in you* since the day they accepted His offer of salvation. He had walked with them every step of the way and would never leave. The assurance of Christ’s presence would ignite the *hope of glory* in their lives. Hope points to the future, and Christ provided a solid foundation for believing there was more to this life than what the Colossians could see at the time. Because Jesus was a part of their day-to-day lives, these Gentiles never had to wonder how things would end up. Through faith, the best was yet to come.

**How was the mystery Paul proclaimed revealed to you?**
Day 3: Our strength comes from God.

*Read Colossians 1:28-29, considering Paul’s source of strength.*

Paul’s message included both *warning* and *teaching*. The first term implies a confrontation designed to correct wrong actions or thinking. The second refers to laying out the foundational truths of God in a way that is easy to understand and elicits a positive response. Warnings focus on what must be rejected, while teaching highlights what should be embraced. Both are necessary in the Christian life. *Wisdom* means seeing things from God’s perspective and acting according to His plan. The presence of the false teachers made God’s wisdom even more important for the Colossians. The result of warning and teaching in wisdom is spiritual growth. Paul longed for the Colossians to become *mature in Christ*. Helping believers become more like Jesus wasn’t a passing interest for Paul; it was what his life was all about. He used the words *labor* and *striving* to convey the intensity he exerted in his ministry. God placed this all-encompassing commission on the apostle’s life, and Paul responded by devoting every fiber of his being to fulfilling that call. Paul also acknowledged that it was not about him; it was all about Jesus. Paul could put in the long hours and endure the persecutions, but it would be worthless unless he was plugged into Christ and trusting in *his strength*. The apostle drew his energy from the supernatural power of Christ working *powerfully* through his life.

How does the gospel empower a person to share the truth about Jesus?
What are the consequences of delivering a message in our own strength?

Day 4: Spiritual maturity includes concern for others.

*Read Colossians 2:1-2, contemplating the burden Paul carried for others.*

While Paul was living under house arrest in Rome, his struggles were internal, not external. The persecutions he was facing did not measure up to the concerns he shared for the wellbeing of his readers. He knew the damage false teaching could do, and this created turbulence in his spirit. He was spiritually wrestling with the enemy on behalf of the believers in Colossae. Paul mentioned the believers in Laodicea as another group on his heart. The Colossians and the Laodiceans represented believers Paul had never seen *in person*. But that fact did not diminish his hopes and dreams for them as Christians. Therefore, he reached out to them and challenged them to mature in their faith—even in the face of false teaching.

**DID YOU KNOW?** The city of Laodicea was located about ten miles from Colossae. Paul wrote a letter to the Laodiceans around the same time he wrote the Colossians and asked that the two congregations swap letters so each one could know what he said to the other (Col. 4:15-16). Laodicea later developed an infamous reputation because of Jesus’ criticism in the Book of Revelation (Rev. 3:14-22).

Does your concern for others serve as an indicator of spiritual maturity? Explain.
Day 5: **All wisdom is found in Christ.**

*Read Colossians 2:3, underlining the verse.*

Paul's explanation for desiring the congregation's encouragement and unity was that they might possess all the *riches of understanding* and *knowledge* that are in Christ. The activity of the false teachers was the impetus behind Paul’s desire. Some false teachers made much of their supposed secrets and hidden wisdom, supposing themselves to have a higher knowledge than that possessed by ordinary Christians. In opposition to such a supposition was Paul’s understanding that all a believer needs to understand and know is found in Christ. Jesus is the “storehouse” for God’s good gifts. We receive them as we come to Him in faith. Growing as a Christian means growing closer to Christ. The mysteries promised by the false teachers couldn’t provide that kind of fellowship or security. Their secrets only led to more bondage, while the gospel sets people free. The Father has given believers everything they need to know Him more intimately through the work of the Son.

**How do you describe the knowledge of God?**

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**TALK IT OUT**

Reflect on the truths found in Colossians 1 and 2, sharing with the other members of your Bible study group.

**What can Paul’s example teach us about pursuing spiritual transformation?**

**What are some ways we can help others grow spiritually?**

**How does knowing the goal of the gospel impact your attitude toward spiritual growth?**