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JANUARY The Trilogy for Spiritual Growth (Colossians 1:1–8)

The main goal of every Christian should be to become all God wants them to be. This requires a trilogy—a set of three related things. The book of Colossians is about **becoming all God wants you to be**. Some of us have further to go in this spiritual journey than others, but all of us must have the required trilogy of characteristics Paul writes about in this passage.

Colossians was written to the church at Colossae (koh-law'-see) in ancient Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), about 100 miles east of Ephesus. The church was probably founded during Paul's three-year ministry at Ephesus (A.D. 52–55; Acts 19:10–30). During that time, a man named Epaphras (Ep'-uh-fras) apparently traveled from Colossae to Ephesus, responded to Paul's preaching, and returned to start a church in Colossae. That's why Paul makes what comment about Epaphras in Colossians 1:7b?

Paul wrote this letter during his first imprisonment in Rome (A.D. 60–62; Acts 28:16), when he also wrote his other prison epistles: *Philippians*, *Ephesians*, and *Philemon*. He wrote *Colossians* to confront the attempts of some believers to combine elements of paganism and secular philosophy with Christian doctrine. In *Colossians*, Paul presents Jesus Christ as the absolute authority and the complete sufficiency for becoming all God wants us to be.

Paul introduces himself as *an apostle of Jesus Christ* (1:1a). The word translated *apostle* (APOSTOLOS, apos'-tol-os) means one sent forth with a message. Its modern equivalent is “missionary.” Yet, Paul was more than a missionary; he also held the office of *an apostle*, even though he wasn't one of the original Twelve. At his conversion on the Damascus Road, how does the Lord describe Paul's future ministry (Acts 9:15b)?

Therefore, Paul was called to be *an apostle ... by the will of God* (1:1c). Paul also sends greetings from his associate and brother in Christ, *Timothy* (1:1c). After introducing himself, Paul reveals the spiritual trilogy required for **becoming all God wants you to be**.

#1: A Saving Faith (1:2–4)

This letter is written *to the saints ... at Colosse* (1:2a). The word translated *saints* (HAGIOS, hag'-ee-os) means “set apart,” or “consecrated,” to God. All Christians are *saints* who should daily experience Paul's prayer for the Colossians—that God will give them His continuing *grace* and *peace* (1:2b). *Grace* refers to God's unmerited favor and supernatural empowerment (Acts 4:33).

Experiencing God's *grace* results in *peace from God*. However, we are responsible for maintaining our *peace from God*. If we don't have *peace from God*—inner tranquility—even during life's storms, we're not all God wants us to be, and it's not God's fault. The key to sustaining *peace from God* is found in Isaiah 26:3. What is it?

Paul constantly prayed for other believers. Therefore, he reminds the Colossians that he *always* prays and thanks God for them (1:3). Nothing is more uplifting than hearing someone thank God for you or for something you have done.

Next, Paul compliments them for their *faith in Christ Jesus* (1:4a). This refers to the saving *faith* they demonstrated when they accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior. The word translated *faith* (PISTIS, pis'-tis) in the Bible is not a blind leap into the dark. Biblical *faith* is being persuaded something is true to the point it changes your life.

For instance, do you believe a jet plane can safely carry you to Australia? If you just “believe” that, you will never get there on a jet. What must you do for a jet to take you to Australia? Trust your life to it by getting on board! That’s what biblical *faith* is. You must “get on board” by *faith*, trusting Christ to get you to heaven. Are you on board right now?

Saving *faith* always reveals itself by what Paul mentions next. What is it (1:4b)?

The first component of **the trilogy for spiritual growth** is **a saving faith**.

#2: A Steadfast Hope (1:5–6)

Paul knows the Colossians’ *faith* has a definite source. It is the *hope laid up* for them *in heaven* (1:5a). This *hope* is also *laid up for us in heaven*. The word translated *laid up* means “reserved.” How is “reserved” *hope* described in Hebrews 6:19?

As Christians, we have a long, long “spiritual chain” with an *anchor* on the end of it. The *anchor* is secured inside the *curtain*, or “veil,” in the real Holy of Holies in heaven. This means we have an unbreakable, unshakable connection to the very throne of God. Just as an anchor keeps a ship from drifting away during a storm, so our *hope* keeps us from “drifting” in our faith during the storms of life.

Concerning what he has just written, Paul reminds the Colossians they *heard* this when they first learned the *truth* of the *gospel* (1:5b). Paul is just repeating what they had already been taught about *faith* and *hope*.

Paul tells the Colossians the Gospel is producing *fruit* all over the Mediterranean *world*, just as it did among them. This is because the Gospel is *the grace of God in truth* (1:6). The Gospel is not a mixture of *faith* and works because salvation is by *grace* alone (Eph. 2:8). How does Paul express this truth in no uncertain terms in Romans 11:6?

The components of **the trilogy for spiritual growth** include: **a saving faith, a steadfast hope, and ...**

#3: A Supernatural Love (1:7–8)

Being the person God wants you to be has three requirements, two of which Paul has already mentioned: *faith* and *hope*. Now, he writes about the third, *love*. These three components are like a three-legged stool; if one leg is missing, you will topple over spiritually. In his epistles, Paul often mentions this trilogy. For example, what three things does Paul remember when praying for the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 1:3)?

We have already talked about Epaphras, whom Paul mentions in verse seven. Paul then writes that Epaphras has told Paul and his associates about the Colossians’ *love in the Spirit* (1:8). Not only did Epaphras take the Gospel to Colossae, but he apparently also brought news of the believers there to Paul, who was a

prisoner in Rome, over 1,000 miles away. That's the distance from Oklahoma City or Dallas to Phoenix, Arizona.

The presence of *love in the Spirit*, or supernatural *love*, in our lives is the acid test of saving faith. How does Jesus make this clear in John 13:35?

Christian theologian Francis Schaeffer said, "With that statement, Jesus gave the world the right to judge us by our love." Some believers are far more difficult to love than others. However, if we have truly placed a saving *faith in Christ Jesus*, we will sincerely desire to love everyone.

At least thirteen times in the New Testament we are **commanded** to love one another (Jn 13:34; 15:12, 15:17; Rom. 12:10; 1 Thess. 4:9; 1 Pet. 1:22; 1 Jn 3:11, 3:23; 4:7, 4:11, 4:12; and 2 Jn 1:5). However, we can't love others on our own. We can only love as God commands if we *love in the Spirit* (Col. 1:8). Since God never commands us to do anything we cannot do, we can *love in the Spirit*. Why, according to Romans 5:5b?

To *love in the Spirit* is to allow God's love to flow through us. Then, we *love* people for who they can become in Christ, not for who they are now. People, even some Christians, are not easy to love. They can be grumpy, rude, unfriendly, and irritating. That's why we are **commanded** to love one another. To become all God wants you to be, concentrate on keeping God's commands. If you do, you will find yourself learning to *love in the Spirit*. How does 1 Peter 1:22 express this truth?

As the Holy Spirit uses God's Word to purify our hearts, we begin to *love in the Spirit* more and more.

Becoming all God wants you to be requires the trilogy for spiritual growth: a saving faith, a steadfast hope, and a supernatural love.

FEBRUARY Finding God's Will for Your Life (Colossians 1:9–14)

After becoming a Christian, nothing is more important than **finding God's will for your life**. Therefore, Paul informs the Colossians he is praying they will *be filled with the knowledge of his will* (1:9c). The word translated *filled* (PLĒROŌ, play-rah'-o) means “to be controlled by.” How can we “be controlled by” God's will? To answer that question, Paul uses three words: *knowledge*, *wisdom*, and *understanding*.

But where do we find the *knowledge*, *wisdom*, and *understanding* we need to discover God's will? In the Bible! The Bible reveals God has two kinds of wills for our lives: a moral, or general, will and a specific, or special, will. God's moral will is the same for all believers. How does 1 Thessalonians 4:3b express one area of God's moral will for everyone?

God also has a specific will, which at least to some degree is different for each believer. For example, whom does God want you to marry? As a Christian, you have a choice in the matter—within certain guidelines. What principle does 2 Corinthians 6:14a give us concerning God's specific will for choosing a marriage partner?

Finding God's specific will requires first being obedient to His moral will as revealed in the Bible, which has at least **five** requirements ...

Walk worthily (1:10a)

We must *walk in a manner worthy of the Lord* (1:10a). The word *walk* refers to lifestyle or conduct. The word translated *worthy* (AXIŌS, ox-ee'-oce) means “of equal weight.” Therefore, if we are *worthy*, our ethics and integrity are equal to God's standards. How does 1 Peter 1:15 describe what it means to be *worthy*?

Having the right biblical *knowledge*, *wisdom*, and *understanding* leads to right living, which is a *holy* life. To find God's will for your life, **walk worthily** and ...

Work fruitfully (1:10b–c)

If we **walk worthily**, our lives will be *pleasing* to the Lord and we will bear *fruit in every good work* (1:10b). This means we are continuously *bearing fruit* in our character and conduct. Also, if our *every good work* is *pleasing* to the Lord, we will be filled with the nine components of the *fruit* of the Holy Spirit, which are a word picture of Christ (Gal. 5:22–23).

As we grow and bear *fruit*, we will continually increase *in the knowledge of God* (1:10c). The first chapter of *Psalms* describes a righteous person who bears fruit. Such a person delights in *the law of the LORD*, the Word of God, and *meditates day and night* on it (Psa. 1:2). The word *meditates* means reflecting upon God's Word with the purpose of applying it to our lives. When the Bible is applied daily to our lives, what is the result, according to Psalm 1:3a–c?

The *fruit* appears at the proper time, not necessarily immediately. *Its leaf does not wither* refers to good spiritual health.

Finding God's will includes: **walk worthily, work fruitfully, and ...**

Withstand mightily (1:11a–c)

“Knowledge is power” is an often-used maxim. Nowhere is this truer than in the Christian life. The result of *increasing in the knowledge* of God's Word and will is *power* (1:11a). The more we know about God's Word and His will, the more we are able to do all things through Christ, who strengthens us (Philip. 4:13).

As we do God's will, He strengthens us so we can withstand temptation and discouragement with *endurance* because of His *glorious might* and *power* (1:11a–c). He also gives us supernatural *power* through the Holy Spirit (Eph. 3:16). How does Ephesians 3:20 describe the result?

Isn't that amazing? As we are obedient to God's will as revealed in His Word, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to accomplish God's will! Never forget this truth: **Wherever God guides, He provides.** He provides the spiritual *power* to accomplish His will. Therefore, when we do God's will, we experience what prayer of Paul's in Ephesians 6:10?

To find God's will for your life, **walk worthily, work fruitfully, withstand mightily, and ...**

Wait joyfully (1:11d)

As a result of receiving God's *power* and *might* when we do His will, we will have *patience with joy* (1:11d). Many people mistakenly think if they find and follow God's will, all their problems and trials will disappear. Quite the contrary, when we decide to follow God's will, we encounter more trials than ever before. This is because the truth of 1 Peter 5:8b is manifested to the maximum when we do God's will. Write it below

If we are not trying to do God's will, why would the devil waste his energy on us? The more we attempt to live for God, the more the Evil One attacks and tries to *devour* our desire to do God's will.

When we experience trials, nothing is a greater witness to the world than their seeing us wait joyfully for our problems to pass. During a storm at sea, the joyfulness of the Moravian Christians convinced John Wesley their faith was genuine. Their obvious joy resulted in him coming to Christ. Along with his brother Charles, John Wesley later founded the Methodist church.

Charles Spurgeon was lecturing a class of preachers on the importance of making their facial expressions harmonize with the sermon. He said: “When you speak of heaven, let your face light up, let it radiate with heavenly gleam, let your eyes shine with reflected glory. But when you speak of hell—well, your ordinary face will do.”

When we have problems, many believers go around with “ordinary” faces that make us look like we are on our way to hell. Instead, during our trials, we should joyfully obey what command in Psalm 27:14?

Finding God's will requires: **walk worthily, work fruitfully, withstand mightily, wait joyfully, and ...**

Worship thankfully (1:12–14)

As we do God's will and grow spiritually, we realize all the many ways God has blessed us in Christ. As a result, we will continually give *thanks to the Father* (1:12a). The word translated *Father* signifies "a nourisher, protector, and upholder." Listen! Apart from Christ, God is only our Judge. But in Christ, He is our *Father*. There are at least three reasons to **worship thankfully**.

First, in Christ, God *has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light* (1:12b). We *qualified* to receive our *share in the inheritance* when we were saved. However, the actual possession of *the inheritance* is in the future. The best part of our *inheritance* is described in Revelation 21:4. Personalize it and write it below:

Second, we should **worship thankfully** because God *has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son* (1:13). This happens when we are saved. The *domain of darkness* refers to the sphere of Satan's jurisdiction. Without Christ, we are hopelessly lost in spiritual *darkness*. We cannot see to find our way out until we encounter *the light of the world* (Jn 8:12). We are then spiritually *transferred* to the *kingdom* of God's Son. How is God's *kingdom*, into which believers are transplanted, described in Romans 14:17b?

Last but not least, in Christ we also have *redemption*, which is *the forgiveness of sins* (1:14).

To find God's will for your life,

**walk worthily,
work fruitfully,
withstand mightily,
wait joyfully, and
worship thankfully.**

MARCH Letting Jesus Fulfill All Your Needs (Colossians 1:15–23)

There are four things everyone needs to be happy. Even though we are all packaged a little differently on the outside and are unique in many ways, on the inside we all have the same four basic needs. One of life's most distressing realizations is that people, prestige, power, or possessions never satisfy these needs. However, the good news is Jesus Christ can fulfill all **four** basic needs, beginning with ...

The Need To Know God (1:15–17)

Paul writes that Jesus *is the image of the invisible God* (1:15a). The word translated *image* (EIKŌN, i-kone') is the word from which we get "icon," which means a "representation." However, the Greek word involves two more factors. First is **likeness**, meaning Jesus is the exact likeness, or mirror image, of God. How is this expressed in Hebrews 1:3b?

The second factor is **manifestation**. The Greek word doesn't denote a weak copy; it implies manifestation of the essence of something. In other words, Jesus doesn't just show us what God looks like; He makes God's essence known to us. This is revealed in what Jesus says to Philip in John 14:9c. Write it below:

Jesus Christ is God with skin on His face. He is also *the firstborn of all creation* (1:15b). Some cults use this phrase to teach that Jesus was the first person God created and therefore cannot possibly be equal with God.

However, the Greek word translated *firstborn* (PRŌTOTOKOS, proto-tok'-os) refers to the firstborn child in a family. In the Middle East, the firstborn son received the birthright, which entitled him to a double inheritance and family leadership upon the death of the father. Therefore, the term *firstborn* refers to the rights of inheritance and leadership, or headship, of a family. Used here, *firstborn* refers to the fact Jesus is the head of the church and supreme over *all creation*. According to Revelation 19:16b, what is written on the *robe* and *thigh* of the glorified Jesus?

Paul further explains that Jesus is the true God, who *created everything in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible* (1:16a). The words *thrones*, *dominions*, *rulers*, and *authorities* probably refer to various ranks of angels (1:16b). Jesus Christ is not simply a part of creation; He is the Creator of *all things*, including angels (1:16c).

To grasp a vague idea of Jesus' power, consider the universe. The universe is so big that a scale model cannot be made. For example, if a scale model reduced earth's size to a one-inch ball, the nearest star (other than the sun), Alpha Centauri (sen-taw'-ree), would have to be placed nearly 51,000 miles away. The model couldn't be put on earth because the circumference of the earth at the equator is only 24,900 miles. However, not only does the magnitude of His creation boggle our minds, but so does the smallness of it, such as atoms

and molecules that are *invisible* to human eyes. *All these things were created by Jesus and for him.* But what else does Colossians 1:17 tell us about Jesus Christ?

The word translated *hold together*, or “consist,” means “adhere” or “held in order.” Who keeps the planets rotating in order around the sun? Who keeps the earth moving around the sun in an elliptical (oval) orbit of 66,000 mph at an average distance from the sun of ninety-two million miles? Who holds together the rapidly moving electrons, neutrons, and protons in all matter? Who created and controls *all things*? Jesus Christ!

When we receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, He meets **the need to know God**. Jesus can also fulfill ...

The Need To Be Loved (1:18–20)

To understand how much God loves us, we must understand He chose to enter His own creation in a body of flesh and blood to die for us on the cross. He was then resurrected that He might become *the head of the body, the church* (1:18a). Christ is *the head of the church*; we are the hands and feet—the parts through whom He accomplishes His will.

Jesus is also *the beginning, the firstborn from the dead* (1:18b). Here, as in verse 15, the term *firstborn* refers to rank or position, not chronology. Christ was not the first person raised from the dead, nor was He the first to raise a person from the dead. In 1 Kings 17, God tells Elijah to go to Zarephath (Zair’-uh-fath) in Sidon. There he encounters a widow whose son has died. Elijah stretches himself out over the boy’s body three times, praying to the Lord for his life to return. Then, what happens, according to 1 Kings 17:22?

Also, the Gospels record that Jesus Himself raised three people from the dead (Mt 9:25; Lk 7:15; Jn 11:44). However, these resurrections were only restorations to normal life because all three died again. Jesus’ resurrection was different because though He died and was buried, he rose again and is *alive forevermore* (Rev. 1:18b).

Christ was the first Person to rise from the dead never to die again. He broke death’s hold on us (1 Cor. 15:22). Therefore, *in everything* Christ became *preeminent*, or supreme, even in death (1:18c).

Next, Paul writes it *pleased* God the Father to have His *fullness*, or completeness, *dwelt* in Christ (1:19). With this statement Paul is refuting the Greek and Gnostic idea that Jesus could not be fully human and fully divine at the same time. What does all this mean to you and me? Read Colossians 1:20 and explain:

The word *reconcile* means “the renewing of a friendly relationship between disputing people.” Jesus returned our relationship with God to the way it was before the Fall in the Garden of Eden. This reconciliation was accomplished by *the blood* of Jesus on the *cross* (1:20a; Jn 3:16). Jesus fulfills our needs **to know God, to be loved**, and ...

The Need for Forgiveness (1:21–22)

Before coming to Christ, we were all *alienated and hostile* in our minds, *doing evil deeds* (1:21). The word *alienated* means “estranged” or “separated” from God. The phrase *hostile in mind* means we have an attitude

that reveals itself in *evil deeds*. Why are pornography, sex, violence, and profane things so prevalent on TV, in movies, in magazines, on the internet, etc? Because the world is *hostile* to the holy ways of God!

However, since Christ died for us on the cross, we are *now reconciled* and can be presented *holy and blameless and above reproach before God* (1:22). The word *holy* means consecrated, or dedicated, to God—as opposed to being *hostile* to Him. The word *blameless* means “faultless” or without any outstanding fault. It is the end result of the process called “sanctification.”

The phrase *above reproach* means “free from accusation.” It means no sin that has been confessed to God and forsaken can ever be brought up again in the divine court of justice. How does God declare this truth to Peter through a vision (Acts 10:15b)?

The word translated *common* (KOINOŌ, koy-no’-o) means “unclean” or “defiled.” The last phrase of Colossians 1:22—*before him*, or “in his sight”—puts into perspective all Christ does for us. If we are in Christ, God sees us as undefiled by sin. You and I cannot see all the wonderful effects of the Cross for those who are saved, but God can.

Not only does Jesus meet **the need to know God, the need to be loved, and the need for forgiveness**, but also ...

The Need for Hope (1:23)

How can we know we have truly had an experience with Christ that fulfills all our needs? The answer is *if indeed you continue in the faith* (1:23a). The answer is really summed up in one word—*continue*. How does Jesus express this fact in John 8:31b?

The proof that reconciliation, or salvation, has occurred is that you continue being *stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard* (1:23b–c). If you have a genuine, life-changing experience with Christ, you will *continue* to follow Him. You may get off course, like King David or the prodigal son, but you will return. What promise in Philippians 1:6b gives us confident hope of our salvation?

Let Jesus fulfill your four basic needs: **the need to know God, the need to be loved, the need for forgiveness, and the need for hope.**

APRIL **Having Your Own Successful Ministry (Colossians 1:24–29)**

Do you want your life filled with excitement, joy, and purpose? Would you like even your suffering and problems to be sources of joy? Then, you must have your own ministry. Paul's life as an apostle was very difficult. Even while writing *Colossians* he was in prison at Rome. Yet, he enjoyed life because his ministry gave purpose to everything in his life, including his suffering.

Paul is an excellent role model for anyone wanting to have his or her own ministry. The Bible teaches every believer should have a ministry. For example, God gave some the gifts to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers (Eph. 4:11). Why, according to Ephesians 4:12?

The word *saints* refers to all believers. Therefore, you should have your own ministry. In Colossians 1:24–29, there are at least **four** prerequisites for **having your own successful ministry**. First is ...

An Attitude of Ministry (1:24–25a)

Paul writes that he rejoices in his *sufferings* (1:24a). He can rejoice because he has the right attitude toward his ministry. Paul knows suffering and persecution are natural parts of building up the body of Christ. When we suffer because of our ministries, we are on the firing line—living lives that refuse to compromise. In an attempt to avoid suffering, we sometimes are tempted not to take a stand or confront sin in our culture. Paul didn't give in to this temptation. Therefore, he suffered, but he rejoiced in his suffering because he knew what promise in Psalm 126:5?

Paul would have rejoiced in his suffering even more had he known his inspired writings would compose almost half the books in the New Testament. Only God can measure the bountiful harvest from Paul's epistles.

Paul also writes his suffering is *filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church* (1:24b). This means he is participating in Christ's sufferings as they continue in His body, *the church*. Jesus is always completely honest. Therefore, what does our Lord declare in John 15:20c?

Paul also understood to have your own ministry you must be a *minister*. Therefore, he writes: *of which I became a minister* (1:25a). The word translated *minister* (DIAKONOS, dee-ak'-on-os) means "servant" and is the word from which we get our word "deacon." If we are ministers, or servants, we serve a master. Who is our Master? Jesus Christ! What does 1 Timothy 4:6c–d reveal is required of a good *minister*, or *servant*, of Christ?

If you have the right attitude toward ministry, you will want to learn as much as possible about *faith* and *doctrine* as revealed in the Bible. Therefore, you will have a keen desire to study the Word of God and hear it taught and preached.

A successful ministry requires **an attitude of ministry** and ...

An Area of Ministry (1:25b–c)

Paul refers to his **area of ministry** as his *stewardship from God* that was given to him *to make the word of God fully known* (1:25b–c). The word translated *stewardship*, or “dispensation” (OIKONOMIA, oy-kon-om-ee’-ah), means “administration.” It carries the idea of managing a household or an estate. Paul knew God had given him a certain area in which to minister. Though it took some time, Paul came to understand his area of ministry was primarily to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15 & 13:47).

Inside your mother’s womb, God chose twenty-three chromosomes from your mother and twenty-three from your father. He uniquely and purposefully combined them to give you the personality, abilities, and intellect that perfectly match the area of ministry He planned for you. For example, in Jeremiah 1:5, what does God tell Jeremiah He did before he was formed in his mother’s womb?

God knit Jeremiah together in his mother’s womb, giving him all the traits needed for his area of ministry. He does the same for you and me, so we perfectly fit our ministry. Besides your own family, the best opportunity for ministry in your life is at your workplace. We are all ministers; we just work at different occupations and vocations to support our ministries.

To have your own successful ministry, you must have **an attitude of ministry, an area of ministry**, and ...

An Assignment for Ministry (1:26–27)

Regardless of the **area** of each individual ministry, we all have the same **assignment**, which is to proclaim *the mystery hidden for ages and generations* (1:26a). The word translated *mystery* (MYSTĒRION, moos-tay’-ree-on) means something that was once a secret but now is fully *revealed*. The *mystery* was *hidden* from people living in Old Testament times, but in the New Testament it is *now revealed to his saints* (1:26b). According to Ephesians 3:6, what is the *mystery* that is *revealed* in the Gospel?

The *mystery* is not that Gentiles who lived before Christ couldn’t be saved. They could! Remember Rahab and Ruth? However, Gentiles who believed and accepted Judaism were proselyte Jews and considered lower than Jews. Also, Jewish women were considered to be on a lower spiritual plane than Jewish men. That’s why there was a court for Gentiles and a court for women within the temple complex. Both were farther away from the temple, and therefore, farther from God than the court for Jewish men.

The *mystery* is that Gentiles can become *fellow heirs* on the same level with Jews, even Jewish men. This is because Gentile and Jewish believers, as well as men and women, are *all one in Christ Jesus* (Gal. 3:28).

The *mystery* is also that God had always intended to make Jews and Gentiles *one in Christ*. Through New Testament saints, *God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory* (1:27). The *glory* of the *mystery* is Christ lives in us who are Gentile believers, in the person of the Holy Spirit. He gives us *hope of glory*, which means the assurance of sharing in His *glory*. We know this because of what truth found in Romans 8:16?

The assignment for every minister is to proclaim that Jesus Christ died on the cross for the sins of the world. Therefore, anyone who believes can be born again into God's family and have a home in heaven. That is the *mystery* we call the Gospel. Having your own ministry requires: **an attitude of ministry, an area of ministry, an assignment for ministry, and ...**

An Aim for Your Ministry (1:28–29)

There should be a twofold aim, or goal, of every ministry. First is *warning everyone* (1:28a). This means we tell people of their need for repentance. We proclaim what warning of Jesus in Luke 13:5?

We must warn *everyone* of the consequences they face if they reject the Gospel. Therefore, as good ministers of Christ, we are to do everything possible to win the lost.

Second, our aim involves *teaching everyone* God's Word, meaning we disciple, or develop, the saved. We know *all Scripture*—every word in the Bible—is inspired by God. It is *profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness* (2 Tim. 3:16). According to the next verse, what should be the result of our teaching?

The one aim or goal of *warning* and *teaching* is that everyone may be presented *mature in Christ* (1:28b). The word translated *mature*, or “perfect” (TELEIOS, tel'-ay-os), means “complete” or reaching an intended end. It refers to completeness in moral character and spiritual growth. Therefore, we should want to see every believer grow and mature spiritually. Since this is not an easy goal, Paul writes he is working and *struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me* (1:29).

Having your own ministry involves a struggle because the Evil One does everything he can to prevent it from being successful or fruitful. However, God gives us *his energy* and *powerfully* works in us to accomplish the ministry He assigns us. How does Philippians 2:13 express this truth?

Four requirements for **having your own successful ministry** are: **an attitude of ministry, an area of ministry, an assignment for ministry, and an aim for your ministry.**

MAY

Growing in Christ (Colossians 2:1–7)

Becoming all God wants you to be requires continually growing in Christ. That's what Paul yearned for in all believers. Therefore, he writes: *For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face* (2:1). The word translated *struggle*, or "conflict," (AGŌN, ah'-goan) is the Greek word from which we get the word "agony." Paul's heart agonized over the confusion caused by the false teachers at Colossae, which kept the believers from growing in Christ. He wants all believers to be able to experience what exhortation in 2 Peter 3:18a?

Paul was also concerned about the believers at *Laodicea*, which was about eleven miles northwest of Colossae. This church was probably founded by one of Paul's converts from his ministry at Ephesus (Acts 19:10). Therefore, neither the people at Colossae nor Laodicea had seen him *face to face*. Paul loved the whole church, not just those he knew personally. We should do the same. If we do, we will want everyone to grow in Christ, which involves **four** elements found in this passage.

1. Comfort (2:2a)

To grow spiritually, every believer needs comfort, or encouragement. Paul writes: *that their hearts may be encouraged* (2:2a). The word translated *encouraged*, or "comforted," (PARAKALEŌ, par-uh-kuh-leh'-oh) refers to coming near to comfort or encourage. Everybody needs a cheerleader in their spiritual lives. I do, and so do you, because living the Christian life can sometimes be very discouraging. That's why we have what command in 1 Thessalonians 4:18?

What are *these words*? The *words* in the Bible. When believers are discouraged because they have fallen into sin, we can use the *words* in the Bible to comfort them. We can remind them of great saints, like King David, who sinned and received God's forgiveness and restoration. If they are discouraged because the Christian life is a *struggle*, we can tell them about the greatest Old Testament prophet, Elijah, who became so discouraged he asked God to take his life (1 Kgs. 19:4). The local church is the original support group established by God to comfort and encourage. Being a comfort to others includes obeying what command in Hebrews 10:25a–c?

Growing in Christ requires **comfort** and ...

2. Connection (2:2b)

A growing Christian must have the "love connection" Paul describes as *being knit together in love* (2:2b). This means we do everything we can to resolve disagreements, so anger, suspicion, and hostility do not exist in our relationships. A priority for someone growing in Christ is developing "love connections" that result in unity and harmony in the church. This means we obey what command in Ephesians 4:31?

If we are growing in Christ, we will not gossip about our brothers and sisters in Christ or spread rumors in the church. Instead, we continually work on building the "love connection."

To grow in Christ, we must have **comfort, connection, and ...**

3. Confidence (2:2c–5)

We must be sure of what is ours in Christ. Paul describes this confidence as the *full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ* (2:2c). In other words, there is no *understanding* or *knowledge* of God apart from a personal relationship with Christ. As we get to know Christ, He gives us *full assurance* that we know God.

In Christ *are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge* (2:3). This was a blow to the false teachers at Colossae who claimed to have a higher level of *wisdom and knowledge*. Paul makes it clear ALL, not just some, spiritual *wisdom and knowledge* are found in Christ. We don't need the visions of a television preacher, or the writings of a cult leader or false teacher; we just need Christ.

Every believer must understand Christ is ALL they need so *no one may delude them with plausible arguments* (2:4). We must have *full assurance*, or **confidence**, that in Christ we have ALL spiritual knowledge so no one can deceive us with persuasive *arguments*. That's why we have that warning in 2 John 1:10?

The next time a Mormon, Jehovah's Witness, or any other cult member comes to your house, don't talk to them. They are highly trained to deceive you with *plausible arguments*. Just say, "No, thank you. The Bible has all the Truth I need. Please leave!" Doing anything to greet or encourage that person is taking *part in his wicked works* (2 Jn 1:11).

Paul warns the Colossians of the dangers of listening to those who would add to the Gospel. Then, he praises them for not doing so by writing he is *rejoicing to see their good order and the firmness of their faith in Christ* (2:5). The word *order* (TAXIS, tox'-is) translates a military term that pictures an orderly group of well-disciplined soldiers who don't break rank. Therefore, Paul sees the Colossians as an army under attack and rejoices that their lines are unbroken, because they exhibit *firmness*, or "steadfastness," in their *faith*.

Elements of **growing in Christ** include: **comfort, connection, confidence, and ...**

4. Christian Conduct (2:6–7)

Paul sums up what it means to grow in Christ: *Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him* (2:6). We are to *walk*, or live, in Christ the same way we originally received Him. How did we receive Him? By faith! How does 2 Corinthians 5:7 describe what it means to grow in Christ?

In verse seven, Paul uses the words *rooted, built up, established, and abounding* to describe how we grow in Christ. **First**, we are *rooted* in Him. We are not spiritual "tumbleweeds," having no roots and being blown around *by every wind of doctrine* (Eph. 4:14). What determines the height and strength of a tree? The depth of its roots! The same is true in our Christian lives. The degree of our spiritual growth is determined by the depth of our spiritual roots in Christ.

Second, to grow in Christ we must be *built up in him* (2:7b). This refers to the process called sanctification, in which we become more and more like Jesus. When you begin construction of a building, you know from the start what you want it to look like when it is completed. Each of us is a spiritual building under construction that begins at salvation and continues for the rest of our lives. God knows the end result of what He is constructing in our lives. One day, we will all be complete. What God wants us to be *has not yet appeared* (1 Jn 3:2a). When will we be totally who God wants us to be and what will we be then (1 Jn 3:2b–c)?

Third, Paul writes that **growing in Christ** requires being *established in the faith* (2:7c). This carries the idea of becoming increasingly stable or firm *in the faith*. How are we *established in the faith* so we can continue to grow? By being *taught* the Word of God (2:7d).

The **fourth** characteristic Paul mentions is the result of the other three. It is *abounding in thanksgiving* (2:7e). A growing Christian overflows with *thanksgiving*. The language of our culture is continually becoming more and more vulgar, irreverent, and filthy. Why? We are living in a culture that is becoming less and less thankful to God for all of His blessings! How does Ephesians 5:4 describe the speech of a growing Christian?

This verse is not teaching that humor is wrong. The word translated *foolish* (MŌROS, mow'-ros) is the word from which we get our word "moron." In this context it refers to having a vulgar mouth and speaking foolishly like a drunk.

In my sermons and teaching, I like to use what I call "holy humor." Sometimes the most spiritual thing I do is make the unhappy members of my flock laugh. Joking just comes naturally to me because it is a part of the personality God gave me. Spirituality isn't being sad and solemn. We need to remember what spiritual truth found in Proverbs 17:22?

An important part of Christian conduct is dispensing this kind of *good medicine*.

Growing in Christ involves these four elements: **comfort, connection, confidence, and Christian conduct.**

JUNE

Why Jesus Is All We Need (Colossians 2:8–15)

In every generation, as in Paul’s day, false teachers try to convince us something needs to be added to Jesus Christ. Many deceived people give up all their worldly possessions to follow some “guru” or cult leader who claims to have a special revelation from God. God doesn’t want us to be taken *captive by philosophy and empty deceit* based on *human tradition* and elementary principles *of the world* rather than believing on Jesus alone (2:8).

The word *philosophy* comes from two Greek words: PHILOS, which means “love,” and SOPHIA, which means “wisdom.” *Philosophy* is the love of wisdom. Here it refers to worldly wisdom, which is *empty deceit*, rather than the teachings of Christ. This includes everything from the “Playboy” *philosophy* to secular humanism—anything that seeks to take our minds *captive*. It also includes religious cults, all of which were started by religious philosophers who added their own philosophies to the Gospel. We should love wisdom, but it must be the right kind of wisdom. How does Proverbs 9:10a describe the right kind of wisdom?

No one English word can fully express the Hebrew word translated *fear* (YIR’Â, year-aw’), but it includes submission, reverence, and awe.

How can we prevent ourselves and our loved ones from being taken *captive by the philosophy and empty deceit* of a cultic, enslaving false teacher? By understanding **three reasons why Jesus is all we need ...**

He is all we need to know about God (2:9)

Why, according to Colossians 2:9?

The word translated *fullness* (PLĒRŌMA, play’-row-mah) means “the sum total.” Jesus is the sum total of God and is everything we need to know about Him and His will for our lives. John tells us, *the Word* [Jesus] *was God* (Jn 1:1c). Then, what do we discover in John 1:14a?

Jesus is God who came to earth in flesh and blood. However, this doesn’t mean the infinite God was wholly contained in Jesus’ physical body. To begin understanding this tremendous truth, picture yourself standing before a seemingly endless ocean. Then, completely fill a glass with water from that ocean. You now have a glass full of ocean water; however, the glass does not contain the entire ocean.

In the same way, God could never be totally contained in a human body. Yet, everything He could be in human flesh, He was in Jesus Christ. Everything our finite minds can comprehend about God is revealed in Jesus Christ. Jesus **is all we need to know about God** and ...

He is all we need for salvation (2:10–14)

Paul puts it like this: *and you have been filled in him* (2:10a). The word translated *filled* (PLĒROŌ, play-rah'-o) means furnished or made complete. It originally referred to a ship totally outfitted and made ready for a voyage. When we receive Christ as Savior, we are not everything we should be and can be, but we do have everything we need for life's spiritual voyage. How does 2 Peter 1:3a express this truth?

Jesus is the head of all rule and authority (2:10b). This means Jesus has power over all forces that exist in the universe. In Christ, we lack nothing we need to know God and live for Him.

Paul continues: *In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands* (2:11a). The rite of circumcising all male descendants of Abraham at the age of eight days was to show faith in God's promise to Abraham (Gen. 17:1–14). However, some Jews who had become Christians believed physical circumcision was essential for salvation and therefore had to be added to Christ. Yet, circumcision—like water baptism—was symbolic. It symbolized “cutting off” the old life of sin and submitting to God (Deut. 10:16).

Spiritual circumcision is *putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ* (2:11 b–c). This means Christ performs “spiritual circumcision” by cutting away our sinful natures. The sign, or evidence, of spiritual circumcision is having a desire to live a new life. Christ sets us free from our sinful desires by a spiritual surgery, not a physical one. This spiritual circumcision takes place the moment we receive Christ. In Christ, our old lives pass away, and we become new creations in Him (2 Cor. 5:17).

We are buried with him in baptism, in which we are also raised with him (2:12a–b). Just as there are two kinds of circumcision, physical and spiritual, there are two kinds of baptism, physical and spiritual. How does Jesus explain spiritual baptism in Acts 1:5?

Since Paul is explaining spiritual circumcision in verse 11, he is referring to spiritual baptism in verse 12. Water baptism pictures a spiritual reality. It pictures, or symbolizes, our identification with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection and that we are spiritually raised to walk in a new life (Rom. 6:3–4). However, spiritual baptism, not physical, is the evidence of our salvation. How is this fact described in 1 Corinthians 12:13a?

Salvation comes exclusively *through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised Christ from the dead* (Col. 2:12c). The power that *raised Jesus from the dead* is the same power that saves and changes us. That same power also enables us to do God's will (Philip. 2:13).

Before salvation you ... *were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh* (2:13a). The word *dead* describes the spiritual state of every human being apart from Christ. It is being *dead* to spiritual stimuli. People who are physically dead are unable to respond to physical stimuli. If I fell over dead and someone spoke to me, I wouldn't hear them. If they kicked me, I wouldn't feel it, because I'm physically dead.

In the same way, spiritually dead people don't respond to spiritual things. When they read the Bible, it doesn't make sense and doesn't inspire them. They think worship services are a boring waste of their time. *Natural*, or unsaved, people don't understand *the things of the Spirit of God* (1 Cor. 2:14a). Why (1 Corinthians 2:14b–c)?

However, *God made us alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses* (2:13b–c). *God made us alive* with Christ when He forgave all our sins. There can be no spiritual life apart from the forgiveness of sin.

Forgiveness is *canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands* (2:14a). The word translated *record of debt*, or “handwriting of ordinances,” refers to a certificate handwritten by the debtor to acknowledge his debt, much like signing a credit card receipt. Therefore, this *record of debt* is a ledger of our trespasses against God’s Law.

The phrase *that stood against us* means the *record* cries out for payment. It is an enormous sin debt we can never pay. The phrase *canceling the record*, or “blotting out the handwriting,” means to wipe out, like erasing a chalkboard or marker board, or shaking an “Etch A Sketch®.”

Paul explains how God did this in Christ: *This he set aside, nailing it to the cross* (2:14b). What can we do about our past-due sin bill? We can only let God take the Cross—damp with Jesus’ blood—and wipe away *the record of debt* that stands *against us*. Read Ephesians 1:7 and explain:

As the lyrics of the old hymn tell us: “What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.”

Jesus is all we need because **He is all we need to know about God, all we need for salvation**, and ...

He is all we need for victorious living (2:15)

Jesus *disarmed the rulers and authorities* (2:15a). The word translated *disarmed*, or “spoiled,” literally means “stripped,” as in stripping a defeated enemy of its weapons and armor on the battlefield. Jesus stripped all spiritual *rulers and authorities* of their evil power over us.

Jesus *put them to open shame, by triumphing over them* (2:15b). On the cross He publicly exposed the failure of satanic powers to interrupt God’s plan of salvation. God wants us to know that though evil powers still exist, they are disarmed before His followers. Because of Christ’s victory, we do not have to live in fear of Satan’s power. We don’t need mediums, good luck charms, or astrologers to protect and guide us—all we need is Jesus. We know we have this victory because of what truth in 1 John 5:4?

Jesus is all we need to know about God, all we need for salvation, and all we need for victorious living.

JULY

Don't Be Intimidated! (Colossians 2:16–23)

Have you ever been intimidated by someone's religious beliefs because they seemed to have or know something you don't? We have all had those feelings. After making clear that Jesus is all we need, Paul now attacks the heresies and false teachings of his generation. These are still alive and well today but with different names. In this passage, Paul gives us **three** things not to be intimidated by ...

Don't be intimidated by legalism (2:16–17)

Paul writes: *Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath* (2:16). Whenever we see the word *therefore* in the Bible, what do we ask? We ask, "What is it there for?" It refers to what Paul has just written to explain that Jesus is all we need. The five items mentioned in verse 16 were all part of the legalism of Judaism.

In Judaism, all *food* fell into two categories, clean and unclean. About three-fourths of all pre-packaged food in the United States today has some kind of "kosher" certification, which means the product is allowed according to Jewish law. The letter "U" in a circle and "K" in a triangle are registered trademarks of kosher certification organizations. These marks, as well as others, are on packages near the product's name or the list of its ingredients. Even a Snickers® candy bar has a circled "U" by its ingredients. So, orthodox Jews can eat it because it has been processed and prepared by kosher standards. However, declaring food as clean or unclean taught spiritual truths fulfilled in Christ; therefore, these restrictions were abolished. For example, what does Jesus declare in Matthew 15:11?

In verse 16, *festival* refers to Jewish feasts, and the *new moon* to monthly Jewish celebrations on the Jewish lunar calendar. *Sabbath* refers to the weekly observance of the Sabbath, from sundown Friday until sundown Saturday. According to verse 17, why don't we need to observe them?

A *shadow* is a temporary, vague representation of the real, permanent thing. A *shadow* shouldn't be confused with the *substance*. Clinging to the Old Testament prophetic shadows of Christ takes away from the spiritual reality of His completeness.

Legalism appeals to our human natures because obeying rules and regulations inflates our spiritual egos and makes us self-righteous. That's why legalistic people are arrogant and judgmental. The epitome of legalism in Jesus' day were the Pharisees. Jesus describes their pride and arrogance in the parable of the Pharisee and wicked tax collector who both go up to the temple to pray. The Pharisee prays, thanking God he is "*not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector*" (Lk 18:11). Then, of what does he brag to God in Luke 18:12?

Everything the Pharisee says about himself is true. The dishonest, despised tax collector simply and humbly prays, " 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' " Then, referring to the tax collector, Jesus says: "*I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other*" (Lk 18:13–14a). The tax collector was *justified* without any righteous acts of his own. Why? How does Ephesians 2:8 answer this question?

Therefore, **don't be intimidated by legalism** and ...

Don't be intimidated by mysticism (2:18a, c, d & e–19)

Mysticism teaches that doctrines or messages from God can be received through meditation, dreams, or visions. Paul begins his warning against mysticism by writing: *Let no one disqualify you* (2:18a). This means not letting anyone defraud you spiritually. How can this happen?

One way we can be defrauded spiritually is by the *worship of angels* (2:18c). In Paul's day, false teachers were saying God could not be approached directly through Christ but only through certain angels. Today, they teach we must approach God through some saint or a mediator other than Jesus Christ. However, what does 1 Timothy 2:5b declare?

Also, people in Paul's day were being defrauded spiritually by false teachers *going on in detail about visions* (2:18d). This is still common, particularly on TV. I once heard a fraudulent TV preacher say that the week before he had seen Jesus standing at the end of his dinner table. He said Jesus told him to tell his followers to send him money so he could begin a new ministry. Does the theme song of "The Twilight Zone" come into your mind just now?

While mystics are having visions and other exciting spiritual experiences, the rest of us are limited to studying the Bible to see what God says about all this. Here's what God says about the mystics, "Don't be intimidated!"

Paul describes a mystic as being *puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind* (2:18e), which means their sinful minds have made them proud. Jesus also describes these false teachers who want to defraud us spiritually and financially. What does our Lord say in Matthew 7:15?

Here is a truth no Christian should ever forget: **the flesh yearns for the sensational; the spiritual yearns for the relational.** Mystics talk about the sensational; spiritual Christians talk about the Savior.

Paul further explains the dangers of mysticism: *not holding fast to the Head* (2:19a). Mystics don't elevate Christ; they elevate experiences and visions. However, Christ is *the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God* (2:19).

To become all God want us to be, we don't need visions or sensational experiences—all we need is Christ. Don't be intimidated by **legalism, mysticism**, and ...

Don't be intimidated by asceticism (2:18b & 20–23)

The word translated **asceticism**, or "voluntary humility," in verse 18b suggests self-abasement and self-denial. It is the belief that spirituality comes from depriving oneself. An ascetic is one who gives up everything to live in a monastery or follow a false teacher. However, *with Christ* we have *died* to ascetic practices that Paul calls *the elemental spirits of the world* (2:20a). How does Paul sum up *asceticism* in verse 21?

These prohibitions suggest that if we *touch* or eat certain foods, we will be spiritually hurt in some way. However, Paul explains *that all perish as they are used* (2:22a). Food does not stay with us. That is why we need to eat three or four times a day. Therefore, whether touched or eaten, food cannot hurt us spiritually. How does Jesus explain why (Mark 7:19a–b)?

Ascetics teach that spirituality is measured by things you give up, not by what you do. *Asceticism* is self-denial *according to human precepts and teachings* (2:22b), not God.

These teachings have *an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh* (2:23). Let me paraphrase: “All this stuff sounds very spiritual, but it’s really a bunch of baloney.” *Asceticism* cannot help you conquer your sinful desires.” Then, what **can** we do to stop indulging the flesh? How does Galatians 5:16 answer that question?

Walking, or living, by the Spirit emphasizes constantly relying on the guidance of the Holy Spirit for daily decisions and actions. Conquering sinful desires is not obtained through *asceticism* but by continually living under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

Don’t be intimidated by legalism, mysticism, or *asceticism*!

AUGUST Victorious Christian Living (Colossians 3:1–11)

A victorious Christian life is essential to becoming all God wants us to be. The first two chapters of *Colossians* are mostly doctrinal, as Paul exposes the false teachings and philosophies that were keeping the Colossians from becoming all God wanted them to be. In the last two chapters, he gives us practical application of these doctrines. In this passage, he tells us **three steps to victorious Christian living ...**

Concentrate on holy things above (3:1–4)

We have been raised with Christ and He is *seated at the right hand of God* (3:1a & c). Christ has already defeated sin and death and made us *alive* (2:13) in Him. The victory is already won. Therefore, Paul tells his original readers and us to *seek the things that are above* (3:1b). The verb *seek* is present imperative, which means it is a command that demands immediate action, like this one: “Smile right now.” We are to concentrate on the unseen things above because of what truth in 2 Corinthians 4:18b?

This is so important God inspires Paul to repeat himself in verse two. *Things that are above* does not refer to such things as pearly gates or transparent gold streets (Rev. 21:21). Paul is referring to holiness, righteousness, and Christ. Don’t miss this! The real battleground in becoming all God wants us to be is won or lost in our minds—what we concentrate on. What we think about determines what kind of people we become. Therefore, we have what command in Romans 12:2a–b?

Did you know as a Christian you are already dead? Some do look more dead than others. *We have died* and our lives are *hidden with Christ in God* (Col. 3:3). The instant we received Christ we *died* to the power of sin. This is because He who is in us (the Holy Spirit) is greater than he (the devil) who is in the world (1 Jn 4:4). As Christians, our spiritual lives are *hidden* from the world *with Christ*. That’s why unbelievers truly don’t understand us.

However, some day when Christ, who is our spiritual life, appears, we *also will appear with him in glory* (3:4). God has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears (1 Jn 3:2a–b). But, we do know what facts found in 1 John 3:2c–d?

The first step in **victorious Christian living** is **concentrate on holy things above**. Then, you can take the second step ...

Eliminate sinful things below (3:5–9)

This means we *put to death ... what is earthly* in us (3:5a). In other words, we kill the sinful things lurking inside us. In the remainder of verse five, Paul gives us a list of sinful things we should *put to death*. When you see a list of sins in the Bible, always pay special attention to what comes first. First in this list is *sexual immorality*, or “fornication.” The word translated *sexual immorality* (PORNEIA, por-nay’-ah) is the Greek word from which we get the word “pornography.” It includes pre-marital sex, adultery, homosexuality, or any kind of sex outside the marriage of a man and woman.

This sin heads the list because in all civilizations that turn away from God, this sin is always prevalent. Sadly, no nation in the world is guiltier of promoting *sexuality immorality* than the United States. According

to one report, more pornography is produced in Los Angeles County, California, than any other place on earth.

The fastest-growing addiction in America for boys and men is hard-core internet pornography, much of which involves children. Child pornography includes images or films depicting sexually explicit activities involving a child. It is a multi-billion dollar industry and among the fastest-growing criminal segments on the internet, according to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). Some of these exploited children are only three or four years old. We live in a very sick, sinful world. When something involves *little ones* who believe in Jesus, we must never forget the chilling words of our Lord. What does Jesus say in Mark 9:42b?

The phrase *little ones* can refer to immature believers but does include children. A *great millstone*, also called a “donkey stone,” was two flat stones, one upon the other, turned by donkeys or oxen to grind grain. The stone weighed several hundred pounds. Jesus dearly loves children and says we must become like children to enter the kingdom of heaven (Mk 10:15). Anyone who looks at child pornography on the internet, or any other place, is supporting the predators who produce it. Therefore, they will share in their judgment. God says we must eliminate all forms of *sexual immorality*.

We must also get rid of *impurity*, or “uncleanness” (3:5), which goes beyond sexual behavior and includes dirty speech, gestures, and impure thoughts of any kind. Next, do away with *passion*, or “inordinate affection” (3:5), which refers to lust that is excited by reading dirty magazines, watching filthy movies, or viewing pornography on the internet. *Evil desire*, or “evil concupiscence,” refers to wanting something sinister or vile. *Covetousness, which is idolatry*, is focusing on fulfilling sinful desires rather than becoming all God wants us to be (3:5). It also refers to greed that totally disregards the well-being of others, such as deceitful “get-rich-quick” schemes. What does verse 6 warn about all these sins?

In verse eight, Paul moves from sexual, sensual sins to social sins. These have been called “the sins in good standing” because they are the sins of which Christians are most often guilty. To live the victorious Christian life, we must *put these all away*, beginning with *anger* (3:8). As already mentioned, we should pay special attention to what comes first because God never gives us a list in which the order is not important. *Anger* is listed first because it is the root cause of most sins that follow. *Anger* (ORGE, or-gay’) refers to a deep, smoldering, emotional time bomb, waiting to explode. *Anger* is the strongest of all emotions because it can cause us to completely lose control. The next word, *wrath*, is rage or *anger* let loose. What warning does Proverbs 29:22b give us?

Next, *malice* means “evil intent.” It is intentionally hurting someone with words or actions. *Slander*, or “blasphemy, (BLASPHEMIA, blas-fay-me’-ah) is a transliteration of a Greek word from which we get the word “blasphemy.” It means “to injure or defame with speech.” It refers to hurting someone with lies, gossip, or rumors. Last in the list of sins we must eliminate is *obscene talk*, or “filthy communication,” referring to crude, abrasive, *obscene*, dirty speech (3:8). How does the list end in verse 9?

A *lie* is a deliberate untruth or half-truth. An old proverb says, “Half a truth is a whole lie.” Any intentional misrepresentation of the truth is a lie.

To live the victorious Christian life, **concentrate on holy things above, eliminate sinful things below,** and

Emulate the life of Christ (3:10–11)

To do this, we must *put on the new self* (3:10), which refers to our *new* nature in Christ. This *new* nature *is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator*, which refers to our sanctification. Sanctification is a lifelong process of becoming more and more like Christ. It is becoming the people God created us to be. What does God say in Genesis 1:26b?

This means we are to be just like Jesus, who is *the image of the invisible God* (Col. 1:15). In our *new* life, the Christian life, *there is not Greek and Jew* [racial prejudice], *circumcised and uncircumcised* [religious bias], *barbarian, Scythian* [cultural distinctions], *slave, free* [social barriers] (3:11). A *Greek* was a Gentile, or non-Jew. A *barbarian* was one who could not speak Greek and was considered unsophisticated. A *Scythian* (sith'-e-un) was a warring, murdering nomad, considered to be the worst of all barbarians.

Regardless of our backgrounds as believers, *Christ is all, and in all* (3:11). Jesus Christ is *in all* of us in the person of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9) and permeates and unites us in all our relationships. How does the last phrase of Galatians 3:28 express this truth?

As someone has said, we don't have to be identical twins to be brothers and sisters in Christ. In any Christian fellowship there will be differences. However, these differences should not cause us to fall into the sins of our old nature, but rather give us opportunity to display the love of Christ (Jn 13:35).

Victorious Christian living has three requirements: **concentrate on holy things above, eliminate sinful things below, and emulate the life of Christ.**

SEPTEMBER How To Dress for Spiritual Success (Colossians 3:12–17)

What do police officers, firefighters, and soldiers have in common? They all wear uniforms that clearly reveal their professions. In the same way, as Christians we are commanded to dress in proper uniforms so we can be easily identified. In the first verse of this passage, we are instructed to *put on* (ENDYŌ, en-doo'-oh), which means "to clothe." This is a vital part of **becoming all God wants you to be**. Dressing for spiritual success requires at least **three** things ...

Remember who you are (3:12b–c)

We must remember we are *God's chosen ones*, or "elect" (3:12b). We are not *chosen* because of our genealogy or merit but solely by God's *grace* (Eph. 2:8). How does Jesus explain this in John 15:16a–b?

Being *chosen* by God should cause us to want to get rid of all sinful desires and be *holy* (Col. 3:12c). The word translated *holy* means "separated" from the world and "dedicated" to God. It means we're "different."

We must also remember we are *beloved* by God. He didn't begin loving us when we "cleaned up our acts." When *we were still sinners, Christ died for us* (Rom. 5:8). To dress for spiritual success, **remember who you are** and then ...

Reach into your spiritual "closet" (3:12d–14)

Now, Paul enumerates eight pieces of spiritual clothing we must *put on*. First is *compassionate hearts* (3:12d). This makes us like Jesus. How does Jesus respond when He sees the crowds (Matthew 9:36b)?

If we are like Jesus and dressed for spiritual success, we cannot be indifferent to human need, hurt, or suffering.

Next, reach into your spiritual "closet" and *put on ... kindness* (3:12e), which is the result of compassion. It is love in action. *Kindness* is the fifth component of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). *Kindness* involves having a sweet disposition, being thoughtful, and performing kind actions.

The next piece of clothing is *humility*, or "humbleness of mind." This means having a realistic view of ourselves. It is the opposite of being full of arrogance and pride. *Put on* this piece of spiritual clothing to obey what command in Philippians 2:3?

Next is *meekness*, which could be translated "gentleness." This means not behaving rudely but being considerate of others. As someone has said, "Rudeness is just a weak person's imitation of strength." *Meekness* is being God's gentleman or gentlewoman. It is not weakness, but power under control. It is a loving willingness to make concessions. Jesus demonstrates the supreme example of *meekness* in the Garden of Gethsemane when He is being arrested to face certain crucifixion. Peter draws his sword, but Jesus tells him to put it away. Then, what does Jesus say He could ask His Father (Matthew 26:53)?

A legion was about 6,000 Roman soldiers. Therefore, Jesus could have called on *more than* 72,000 angels, any one of which has the power to destroy the world (Rev. 8:5–12).

Finally, *put on ... patience*, or “longsuffering.” Two words are translated *patience* in the New Testament. One means having *patience* with things or circumstances and the other having *patience* with people. The word translated *patience* in this passage refers to *patience* with people who frustrate or irritate us. It is self-restraint in the face of insult, irritation, or provocation. Again, the supreme example is our Lord (Mt 27:28–31).

Being dressed for spiritual success shows up in the way we treat people and begins in our homes. *Patience* requires *bearing with one another* (3:13a), or making allowance for the faults of others. It overlooks the offenses of others. According to Proverbs 19:11, what does *patience* do?

If we have truly reached into our spiritual “closet” to dress for success, the next phrase will be true in our lives: *if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other* (3:13b). We will be willing to forgive insults, hurt feelings, etc. It means we don’t hold a grudge. To make sure we don’t misunderstand, Paul writes: *as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive* (3:13c). Because we have been forgiven, we are obligated to become Christ-like forgivers.

None of the “clothing” mentioned so far will stay on without something to hold them together. Therefore, Paul writes: *And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony* (3:14). *Love* is like a belt that holds together the other articles of spiritual clothing. Without *love*, our spiritual “pants” will fall down. That can be even more embarrassing than when our physical pants fall down. Nothing is more important than *love* because we can’t dress for spiritual success without it. That’s why we have what command in 1 Peter 4:8?

Put on love every day, so your spiritual clothes don’t fall off and embarrass you, your church, and most importantly, your Lord.

Dressing for spiritual success has these requirements: **remember who you are, reach into your spiritual “closet,”** and ...

Refuse to be undressed (3:15–17)

The way we dress affects our demeanor and our behavior. So, Paul writes: *And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts* (3:15a). The word translated *rule* is an athletic term meaning “to umpire.” The *peace of Christ* should “make the call” in our decision-making. When we make the decision Christ wants, we will sense a deep, abiding peace in our *hearts*.

Not everyone, not even all Christians, plays by the rules. Therefore, at times we will be hurt, offended, or insulted, sometimes by a fellow believer. When this happens, Christ—our spiritual Umpire—will always repeat to us what He said three times to His disciples after His resurrection. What is it (John 20:19, 21 & 26)?

When we are dressed for spiritual success, we will bring *peace* everywhere we go. When conflicts arise at home, church, school, or work, Jesus whispers, “*Peace be with you.*” How does Romans 12:18 express this truth?

When we let Christ serve as Umpire in all our decisions and reactions, we will *be thankful* (3:15b). Six times in this short, four-chapter epistle, Paul tells us to express our thankfulness (1:12; 2:7; 3:15, 16, & 17; 4:2). ***Peace in the heart results in a thankful mouth.***

Refusing to be spiritually undressed is basically letting *the word of Christ dwell in you richly* (3:16a). This refers to all the words of Christ not only in the Gospels, but the entire Bible as well. We are also to be continuously *teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom* (3:16b). *Teaching* is imparting the truth of God's Word; *admonishing* is cautioning or rebuking in love.

Another result of refusing to be spiritually undressed is *singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God* (3:16c–d). We will want to praise God because being dressed for spiritual success makes life so much better. The word translated *psalms* (PSALMOS, salmos') denotes "a striking or twitching with fingers" on strings and refers to songs accompanied by musical instruments. *Hymns* would typically be sung a cappella. For example, after the Lord's Supper, what do Jesus and the disciples do before going to the Mount of Olives (Matthew 26:30a)?

Spiritual songs emphasize personal testimony. The word translated *songs* (ŌDĒ, oh-day') is the word from which we get "ode," which is a poem set to music. *Spiritual songs*, like "Amazing Grace," emphasize what God has done for us. However, all music should be designed for *teaching and admonishing* (3:16b). So, worship music is not to be just "touchy feely" but should teach the Word of God. That's why I love hymns and praise songs that are Bible verses set to music or that glorify one of God's attributes, such as His grace or goodness. Regardless of the type of music, we should always sing with our *hearts to God* (3:16d). In other words, what comes out of our mouths should agree with what is in our hearts.

Refusing to be undressed also includes: *whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus* (3:17a–b). Everything we say and do should be as representatives of *the Lord Jesus*. Through our lives, we should always be *giving thanks to God the Father through him* (3:17c). We should be thankful for the awesome privilege of being Jesus' representatives on earth, which is what it means to be a Christian. Dressing for spiritual success is simply putting *on the Lord Jesus Christ* (Rom. 13:14a). What is the result (13:14b)?

To dress for spiritual success: **remember who you are, reach into your spiritual closet, and refuse to be undressed.**

OCTOBER How To Have a Happy, Healthy Home (Colossians 3:18–21)

God wants every marriage to be terrific. For that to happen, both partners must be all God wants them to be in their home. Virginia and I have been married for over forty years. We have had about thirty good years. This is because there are tough times in every marriage; therefore, having a happy, healthy home requires a lot of very hard work. However, besides hard work, having a terrific home also requires what three essential elements found in Proverbs 24:3–4?

In a home, these three factors are like the legs on a three-legged stool. If one “leg” is missing, the home will falter. All three are required to properly apply God’s design in the **four** areas listed in Colossians 3:18–21, beginning with ...

God’s Design for Wives (3:18)

God’s design for *wives* is to *submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord* (3:18). In today’s culture, this verse has taken a “bum rap” regarding the role of women in marriage. However, this verse is a call to obey the God-ordained position of the husband in a marriage. Submission doesn’t diminish the equality or dignity of the wife. Christ Himself is the model for this principle, being equal with God and yet submitting to the One with whom He is equal (Philip. 2:6–8).

Many marriages are monsters because there is no clear line of authority. Any institution must have a clearly defined level of authority, and the family is no different. There is a saying: “Anything without a head is dead, and anything with two heads is a monster.”

The wife’s submission is to be *as is fitting in the Lord* (3:18b). This phrase means a wife is not obligated to follow her husband’s leadership if it conflicts with the teaching of Scripture. A wife’s submission is designed to fulfill the God-given role of a model wife in regard to her husband. What is it according to Proverbs 31:12?

Since a wife is only to be submissive *as fitting in the Lord*, her submission is not absolute. If a husband should ever ask his wife to do something that violates the teaching of Scripture or her conscience, she has the right and the duty to disobey her husband. She must follow what biblical principle given by Peter and the apostles in Acts 5:29b?

Most importantly, **God’s design for wives** must never be taken out of context. It is issued in the framework of love, which brings us to ...

God’s Design for Husbands (3:19)

The motivation for wives to *submit* to their own husbands is the husband’s unselfish love for his wife. Therefore, we read: *Husbands, love your wives* (3:19a). The word translated *love* (AGAPATE, ag-uh-pate) is a present tense verb, meaning continuous action. It could be translated: “Husbands, keep on loving your wives and sacrificing for them every day.”

If a husband doesn't daily show his wife he loves her, he violates that command, which is a sin. The best commentary on this verse is Ephesians 5:25–33. In that detailed passage about God's design for husbands, what command does Ephesians 5:25 give *husbands*?

A husband is to love his wife so much he would die for her and proves it daily by the way he lives for her. This requires obeying the command: *do not be harsh with them* (3:19b). The word translated *harsh*, or "bitter," means a husband should never display rudeness or resentment toward his wife. Instead, wives must be treated with kindness and respect.

God commands husbands to *live with their wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life*. If a husband doesn't honor his wife, his *prayers will be hindered* (1 Pet. 3:7).

A husband is to *honor* his wife as *the weaker vessel*. This doesn't mean women are inferior; in fact, in many marriages the wife is superior intellectually and morally. The term *weaker vessel* means she is physically weaker. Because God created her as the *weaker vessel* physically, a husband is never to use his superior physical strength to force himself on his wife sexually or any other way.

Also, most men are emotionally like iron skillets, while most women are like fine china—*weaker* vessels. Imagine a "hammer" of rude, harsh words hitting an iron skillet. Then, imagine the same hammer hitting a fine china cup. Most women are more easily hurt emotionally by offensive, cruel words.

A husband is never to demean or bully his wife; that is a horrible sin. He is to protect, not hurt, his wife. God's design is for husbands to provide loving leadership in the home. Any wife would gladly submit to such a husband. However, what if a husband isn't a believer? In that case, the wife is still to *be subject*, or submissive, and be a model Christian wife (1 Pet. 3:1a–b). Why, according to the last phrase in that verse?

An unbelieving husband is to *be won* to the Lord by observing the *respectful and pure conduct* of his wife (1 Pet. 3:2).

After God's design for **wives** and **husbands**, we come to ...

God's Design for Children (3:20)

It is very simple and clear: *Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord* (3:20). This verse is basically a paraphrase of the fifth commandment (Ex 20:12). *Children* are to listen to and carry out the instructions of their *parents*, **both** parents.

Disobedience to parents is a serious sin when children are old enough to understand because it violates the fifth commandment and is ultimately rebellion against God. In God's eyes, disobedience to parents is very serious because it is included with what sins in Romans 1:30

Although being *disobedient to parents* is a very serious sin, every time children *obey* their *parents*, it *pleases the Lord* (3:20). However, there is one more component in learning **how to have a happy, healthy home** ...

God's Design for Parents (3:21)

The obedience of children is in the context of this command: *Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged* (3:21). The word translated *fathers* (PATĒR, pat-air') could be translated "parents" (Heb. 11:23). The command for children to obey their parents doesn't give parents the right to be harsh or mean. Remember, "rules without relationship lead to rebellion."

Children don't need another pal; they need an authority figure who sets boundaries for protection and guidance. When a boundary is crossed, there must be discipline, because rules without discipline are nothing more than suggestions. Parents have the God-given responsibility to discipline their disobedient children. However, discipline should always be administered fairly, firmly, and lovingly. Parents need to remember what truth in Proverbs 29:17?

Every parent should know the difference between discipline and punishment. Discipline promotes change; punishment inflicts pain. Discipline focuses on future behavior; punishment focuses on past behavior. Discipline is usually dispensed in love; punishment is usually administered out of frustration and anger.

Parents should never discipline in anger because they will be more concerned with relieving their frustration than disciplining the child. We need to remember Proverbs 27:4a–b. Write it below:

Wrath is the emotion of *anger* let loose or vented. Discipline should only be administered when parents are cool, calm, and collected. The best way for a parent to know if he or she is punishing in anger or disciplining in love is to ask: "Is my child afraid of me?" Parents should frequently ask themselves this question because of what fact in 1 John 4:18a–c?

Love always disciplines to protect and guide, never just to dispense pain or punishment. Discipline might include things such as standing in the corner for fifteen minutes, which worked very well when my children were pre-school and elementary age. For teenagers, loss of cell phone or driving privileges or being grounded for a specific period of time often works well.

Having a **happy, healthy home** requires following God's design for **wives, husbands, children, and parents**.

NOVEMBER Working God's Way (Colossians 3:22–4:1)

Have you heard the saying, “T.G.I.F.”? It stands for “Thank God it’s Friday.” That slogan promotes the negative view of work held by many people in our culture. Every Christian’s work motto should be “T.G.I.M.”—“Thank God it’s Monday, and I have a job.”

Although this passage refers to *slaves* and *masters*, the principles apply to the employee-employer relationship. Some might ask why Jesus and the apostles didn’t call for the abolition of the dehumanizing practice of slavery. At that time the church was a very small minority, already being persecuted and with no political power. Teaching slaves to rebel would have only resulted in the slaughter of thousands of slaves. However, the inspired writers of the Bible planted the seeds that would ultimately lead to the undermining of slavery. First Timothy 1:9–10 lists some of the more horrible sinners. What is listed third in verse ten?

The word translated *enslavers*, or “menstealers,” refers to slave dealers who take someone captive to sell him or her into slavery. It can also be translated “kidnappers.” In the Roman Empire, slavery was not based on race; it was the result of being captured in war and sold into slavery. People were also sold into slavery to recover unpaid debts. Most slaves in the Roman Empire were more like the domestic servants in Victorian Great Britain. Even doctors and teachers were slaves.

Paul sent Tychicus, along with the runaway slave Onesimus, to deliver the epistle of Colossians (4:7–9). Tychicus apparently also took Onesimus to Philemon, a member of the Colossian church and Onesimus’ owner. Paul had won Onesimus to Christ, so he wrote a short personal letter to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus. This letter is the epistle that bears Philemon’s name. How does Paul ask Philemon to receive his runaway slave in Philemon 16a–b?

Paul asks Philemon to receive Onesimus as he would receive him. He also tells Philemon that if Onesimus owes him anything, he will take care of it (Philemon 17–18).

With that background information, let’s now examine what it means to work **God’s way**.

God’s Way for Employees (3:22–25)

Paul begins: *Slaves* [today, employees], *obey in everything those who are your earthly masters* [today, employers] (3:22a). Paul obviously is not referring to anything contrary to biblical teaching, but to what might be unpleasant or difficult. In the workplace, Christians are not to be whiners, gossips, or goof-offs. We are to work with dignity and a positive attitude. That requires obeying what command in Philippians 2:14?

God’s way of working is *not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers* (3:22b). This means we don’t work just when the boss is watching. Instead, we work *with sincerity of heart* (3:22c), which means in honest dedication. Our motivation is *fearing*, or revering, *the Lord* (3:22c). God wants His children to be known as hard-working people of integrity. If we don’t give a full day’s work for a full day’s pay, we are being dishonest and steal from our employer. What does Proverbs 18:9 say about goofing off at work?

The term *brother* indicates belonging to the same class of people. Therefore, in God's sight a lazy, or "slothful," person is like a vandal who destroys someone else's property. Both cost the owner money. Being *slack*, or "slothful," includes taking lunch and other breaks that exceed specified times. It also includes habitually coming in late and leaving work early.

Instead of being lazy at work, what is **God's way** of working, as described in Colossians 3:23?

As Christians, we work first *for the Lord* and second for our paychecks. It is very important to keep this verse in context. The slaves to whom this was originally written had little, if any, opportunity to escape slavery. Most received no monetary compensation for their work. Think how much more this verse applies to employees today who can easily change jobs and who receive not only a salary, but benefits such as paid vacations, sick days, health insurance, retirement, etc.

Paul continues: *knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ* (3:24). Slaves had no *inheritance* in this world, regardless of how hard they worked. In the same way, many Christians may never receive what they deserve in this world, but they will ultimately *receive their reward* from Christ. We will be rewarded not only in the afterlife but also in this life. What does Proverbs 22:29b–c tell us about a person who is *skillful in his work*?

Competent workers usually get promotions and serve in good jobs, not staying in entry-level ones. Most people with great jobs have worked long and hard to get where they are.

God's word to employees ends with a solemn warning: *For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality* (3:25). Failure to fulfill our responsibilities at work is *wrong*. God will judge that *wrong* with absolutely *no partiality* because He doesn't show favoritism (Rom. 2:11). Just because a Christian works in less than ideal circumstances or has a harsh boss, he or she does not have the right to be disrespectful or lazy, sow discord among employees, or do shoddy work. No matter who we are or where we work, if we are guilty of conduct unbecoming a Christian, we *will be paid back for the wrong* by God.

The reason God wants us to be respectful to our employers and be the very best of employees is found in 1 Timothy 6:1b. Personalize this verse and write it below:

We are to be great employees so *the name of God* and *the teaching* of the New Testament will not be tarnished.

We've looked at **God's way for employees**; now let's consider ...

God's Way for Employers (4:1)

Masters [employers] are to *treat* their *slaves* [employees] *justly and fairly* (4:1a). This command was a bombshell in Paul's day because *slaves* had no rights at all, and *masters* had no responsibilities to them. The modern application of this verse is a Christian employer must treat employees *justly and fairly*, which means a fair day's pay and benefits for a day's work.

God requires all employees be treated with dignity and respect, as valued human beings. We are to give the same honor and concern to the most unskilled employees as to the highest levels of management. How does James 2:9 express this principle?

That doesn't mean everyone is paid the same, but everyone is treated with the same dignity and respect. Employers, or bosses, should never raise their voices or yell at employees. Also, employees should never be reprimanded in front of other people. God's way for relationships at home and at work is to **compliment in public and correct in private**.

The reason for God's admonition to employers is they *also have a Master in heaven* (4:1b). One day all employers will give account to God for the way they have treated their employees. If you have responsibility over other people, make sure you treat everyone *justly and fairly*, because you will one day have to give an account to your *Master in heaven*. The word translated *Master* (KYRIOS, koo'-ree-os) means "Lord," or boss. These words in *Colossians* are not Paul's; they are inspired by the Lord Himself. What rhetorical question does the Lord Jesus ask in Luke 6:46?

Calling Jesus "Lord," but not doing what He says concerning your workplace, is nothing but hypocrisy.

Being a great witness at work, which is your greatest mission field, requires **working God's way** and obeying His Word in regard to **employees and employers**.

DECEMBER Improving Your Communication with God and People (Colossians 4:2–6)

How we communicate with God and other people clearly reveals if we are becoming all God wants us to be. Our true character shows up privately in how we talk to God and publicly in how we talk to people. How does Jesus reveal this fact in Matthew 12:34c?

The word translated *abundance* could be translated “overflow.” If you bump a full cup of coffee, what spills out? Coffee, right? In the same way, through the “bumps” of life, what is in our hearts spills out through our mouths. Improving your relationships with God and other people greatly depends on how you talk to them. Therefore, let’s look at ...

Improving Your Communication with God (4:2–4)

Paul gives us **five** ways we can improve our communication with God through prayer....

1. Pray persistently. Paul puts it like this: *Continue steadfastly in prayer* (4:2a). How does Jesus express this same principle in Luke 11:9?

What are the verbs in that verse? *Ask, seek, and knock*. The first letter of each word makes an important acrostic: ASK! Also, these verbs are present tense, so the phrase could be translated “keep on asking, keep on seeking and keep on knocking.”

Our Lord is not teaching that our Heavenly Father is a reluctant or uncaring God who has to be begged to respond to our needs. He is saying persistence in prayer is sometimes necessary to receive an answer. Praying persistently is not trying to persuade God to do something He does not want to do; it is for our benefit. George Müller, the great prayer warrior of the 19th century, said the reason God wants us to persevere is “to try our faith” and “to make the answer so much sweeter” when it finally comes. To improve your communication with God, **pray persistently** and ...

2. Pray watchfully. *Being watchful* (4:2b) means to keep your eyes and ears open for things you should pray about so you can pray often. As people or situations come to your mind, immediately say a brief prayer. This is how Paul prayed. How does he indicate this in Philippians 1:3?

You may not always be able to pray aloud or with your eyes closed, but you can pray silently and briefly. Long prayers in the mornings or evenings are great, but another great way to improve your relationship with God is to pray short, more frequent prayers throughout the day. Improving your communication with God includes praying **persistently, watchfully**, and ...

3. Pray thankfully. Always include *thanksgiving* (4:2c) in your prayers. We often pray only about problems and needs, but specifically thanking God for something every day will make life so much better. Philippians 4:6a begins by telling us not to *be anxious*, or “careful,” [don’t worry] about anything. What does the rest of that verse command?

Every time you pray, thank God for at least one thing. Nothing will improve your prayer life and your attitude about life as much as always including *thanksgiving* in your prayers.

To improve your communication with God, **pray persistently, watchfully, thankfully**, and ...

4. Pray specifically. Paul has a specific prayer request: *At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison* (4:3). A common problem in prayer is being too general. For example, we pray, “Lord, please bless ‘so and so.’ ” Can’t you hear God asking, “In what way?” Or, we may pray, “Lord, please be with ‘so and so.’ ” Does that imply God has deserted them? Praying this way is like walking into a restaurant and saying to the waitress, “Please bring me some food.” The waitress would quickly say, “Could you be a little more specific?” What reason does James 4:2c give for prayers often not being answered?

In other words, we don’t ask specifically. Your communication with God will greatly improve if you pray **persistently, watchfully, thankfully, specifically**, and ...

5. Pray cooperatively. Never ask God to do something if you are not willing to cooperate by doing your part. Therefore, Paul writes: *That I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak* (4:4). Paul uses the pronoun “I” twice in this short verse because he knows effective prayer requires doing his part. As someone has said, “When a farmer prays for a good corn crop, God expects him to say ‘amen’ with a hoe in hand.” Always be willing to put feet to your prayers.

To improve your communication with God, **pray persistently, watchfully, thankfully, specifically**, and **cooperatively**. Now, let’s look at ...

Improving Your Communication with People (4:5–6)

We should always be improving our relationships with unbelievers as well as with other believers. That’s why Paul writes: *Walk in wisdom toward outsiders*, or unbelievers (4:5a). *Wisdom* includes knowing how to communicate productively. If we are to be all He wants us to be, God requires us to be well thought of by unbelievers. Pastors are to be models of what God expects of all believers. What requirement for pastors is found in 1 Timothy 3:7a?

Paul knew most *outsiders*, or “them that are without,” are unbelievers who will never physically read the gospel. Therefore, the only gospel they will ever read is your life. There is an old poem that expresses this truth: “You are writing a gospel, a chapter each day, by the deeds you do and the words you say. Men read what you write, whether false or true. Just what is the gospel according to you?”

To win *outsiders*, believers *must be well thought of* outside the church. That’s why God wants us to have good reputations among *outsiders*.

To improve relationships with people requires *making the best use of*, or “redeeming,” *the time* (4:5b). Someone has said, “I make enemies rather than friends because it’s less trouble.” However, believers are to make the *best use of* every opportunity to influence others for Christ. Of what does Proverbs 11:30b remind us?

We will not win people to Christ by beating them over the head with the Bible. We won't win them by telling them to "turn or burn" or "die and fry like a french fry." We win them by being *well thought of* and wise.

To improve our communication with all people, Paul writes: *Let your speech always be gracious* (4:6a). Notice the word *always*. Therefore, we are to *be gracious* whether we are talking to believers or non-believers. The word *gracious* (CHARIS, kar'-is) means kind, acceptable, beneficial, and pleasant. Here it refers to God's refining grace. As we allow God to transform us into the people He wants us to be, our *speech* becomes more and more pleasant, kind, and friendly. *Gracious* speaking makes the one spoken to feel important, valued, and loved. How is this kind of *speech* described in Proverbs 16:24?

Our *speech* must also be *seasoned with salt* (4:6b). In Paul's day, salt had at least two basic purposes. First, it was used as a preservative to keep things from decaying or becoming rotten. As Christians, our *speech* should prevent conversations from turning foul and unwholesome. Also, we are not to let corrupt, or rotten, talk come out of our mouths (Eph. 4:29a). Instead, what does Ephesians 4:29b–d declare should characterize our speech?

Second, salt was used to season food to make it taste better. In the same way, our speech should be non-offensive. *Speech ... seasoned with salt* also carries the idea of adding charm and wit to a conversation. Christians should be interesting and fun to talk to.

The phrase *so that you may know how you ought to answer each person* (4:6) means being sensitive to the needs of each individual. How does Proverbs 25:11 express this principle?

This means the right words at the right time are invaluable. Having the right words at the right time depends on your relationship with God. This is because improving your relationship with God automatically improves your relationships with other people because God's love will flow through you (Rom. 5:5).

Get started today **improving your communication with God and people.**

Everyone needs friends. Like the apostle Paul, at times money and success are not what we need; we just desperately need great friends. Paul had many friends. In these closing verses of *Colossians*, he mentions several of them. Through his comments about his friends, we find some principles for making great friends.

Be faithful (4:7–10a)

Paul writes that his associate *Tychicus* (Tike'-uh-cus) will tell Paul's readers how he is getting along. Then, how does Paul describe Tychicus, his *beloved brother* in Christ (4:7c)?

Tychicus was a *faithful* member of Paul's ministry team who traveled with him on his third missionary journey (Acts 20:4). When Paul was arrested, Tychicus was among the friends who stayed with Paul in Rome. Tychicus never wrote an epistle, and no specifics of his ministry are recorded in *Acts*. He was one of those rare friends who worked privately behind the scenes to ensure that his friend Paul was more effective in his ministry. He was an example of what fact in Proverbs 17:17a?

Paul is sending his friend Tychicus to tell the believers at Colossae how he is doing in prison and to *encourage* them (4:8). Tychicus carries the Colossian letter from Paul. He also delivers the letters of *Ephesians* and *Philemon* (Eph. 6:21–22). During his second imprisonment, as his execution approaches, one of Paul's last acts is recorded in 2 Timothy 4:12. What was it?

Tychicus was a *faithful* friend, whom Paul knew would carry on the ministry after his death.

Paul mentions another *faithful* friend he is sending with Tychicus: *Onesimus* (Oh-ness'-uh-mus). Describing Onesimus, Paul writes: he is *a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you* (4:9a). A native of Colossae and Philemon's runaway slave, Onesimus was converted under Paul's ministry. Paul is sending Onesimus as one of his dear friends back to Colossae, along with Tychicus.

Though Onesimus had only been a Christian a short time, he had proven to be a *faithful* friend and *beloved brother* (4:9). Tychicus will also deliver a personal letter to Philemon, which is the epistle that bears his name. The theme of *Philemon* is the power of the Gospel to transform lives. What does Paul write to Philemon about Onesimus in Philemon 11?

Did you know some of the best friends you will ever have may not yet be Christians? Until they come to Christ, they may be *useless to you* as friends. One of my best friends is Bud Jenkins, who won me to the Lord. Some of your best friends-to-be are just waiting on you to win them to the Lord. Begin the process with an invitation to worship services or Bible study. Some of the best friends you will ever have are those you influence for Christ.

Next, Paul lists *Aristarchus* (air-is-tar'-kus), whom Paul describes as *my fellow prisoner* (4:10a). Aristarchus was from Thessalonica and accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey. He was with Paul during the riot at Ephesus (Acts 19:29). He also accompanied Paul when he sailed for Rome as a prisoner and, therefore, was with him when he was shipwrecked (Acts 27:2, 39–44). Through it all,

Aristarchus remained *faithful* to Paul. According to church tradition, the emperor Nero had Aristarchus put to death in Rome.

To make great friends, **be faithful** and ...

Be forgiving (4:10b)

Next in Paul's list of friends is *Mark the cousin of Barnabas* (4:10b). This is John Mark (Acts 12:25), the author of the second gospel. He accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. However, John Mark deserted them. When Paul and Barnabas began their second journey, Barnabas wanted to take his cousin John Mark with them. Paul refused. As a result, what happened (Acts 15:39a)?

Barnabas then took John Mark with him and sailed to Cyprus (Acts 15:39b). John Mark did make a big mistake, but Paul forgave him. In any friendship there will be disappointment and hurt. Therefore, an essential component of true friendship is forgiveness. At the end of Paul's life, in his last letter, Paul writes Timothy and tells him to bring John Mark to him because he is so useful in his *ministry* (2 Tim. 4:11b).

The mention of John Mark challenges us to think of people we have written off. This is easy to do with people who disappoint or hurt us. We all have our "John Marks" who deserve a second chance to be our friends.

Making great friends includes: **be faithful, be forgiving, and ...**

Be soothing (4:11)

The next friend Paul names is *Jesus who is called Justus* (4:11a). "Jesus" was a common Jewish name because it is the Greek form of the Hebrew name "Joshua," which means "Yahweh saves." When the angel tells Joseph that Mary will have a son, he tells Joseph to name him *Jesus*. Why, according to Matthew 1:21c?

We know very little about Justus because his name appears only in this New Testament passage. Paul writes that Justus, John Mark, and Aristarchus are the only Jewish believers among his *fellow workers*. Then, he adds: *they have been a comfort to me* (4:11b). This statement implies Paul's deep heartbreak over the vast majority of his own people rejecting the Gospel. Instead, the Jews plotted to kill Paul and persecuted other believers.

In contrast, Justus, John Mark, and Aristarchus were willing to be alienated from their fellow Jews and identified with Paul because of the Gospel. Therefore, they were a great *comfort* to Paul. The word translated *comfort* (PARĒGORIA, par-ay-gor-ee'-ah) is an unusual word and is found only here in the New Testament. It means "to soothe." We get our English word "paregoric" from this Greek word. Paregoric is a drug that could be obtained without a prescription until 1973. It is taken for the relief of diarrhea or intestinal pain. However, the Greek word refers to any soothing, pain-killing medicine. We all need friends who can soothe our hurts and disappointments. Of what does Proverbs 27:9b remind us?

Principles for making great friends are **be faithful, be forgiving, be soothing, and ...**

Be prayerful (4:12–13)

We all need friends who are prayer warriors; therefore, Paul writes: *Epaphras* (Ep'-uh-fras), *who is one of you* (like Onesimus, a Colossian), *a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers* (4:12a). Epaphras founded the church in Colossae, his hometown. He probably also founded the churches in Hierapolis (high-er-op'-o-liss) and Laodicea, since they were near Colossae (4:13).

Epaphras was a man of prayer. Paul informs the Colossian believers that Epaphras prays *that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God* (4:12b). In other words, he prayed for their spiritual development. Epaphras has the distinction among all of his friends of being the only one whom Paul commends for his prayer ministry. For Epaphras, prayer was serious business and he was *always struggling*, or “laboring fervently,” in his prayers for his friends. A great prayer for friends is to pray they will live *worthy* of God’s *calling* (2 Thess. 1:11b). What else should we pray for our friends, according 2 Thessalonians 1:11c

To make great friends, **be faithful, be forgiving, be soothing, be prayerful**, and ...

Be sacrificial (4:14–18)

Next, Paul sends greetings from his friend *Luke*, whom he identifies as *the beloved physician* (4:14a). Luke has the distinction of being the only Gentile writer in the New Testament. Luke was the original medical missionary. He probably gave up a medical practice to use his talent and training for the Lord. In return, the Lord gave him the privilege of writing the gospel that bears his name and the book of Acts. If you count the words in both books, he wrote more than any other New Testament writer. Luke remained with Paul to the very end of Paul’s life. In 2 Timothy 4:11a what does Paul write as some of his last words.

Luke never deserted Paul, no matter how difficult the circumstances. The same cannot be said about the next friend Paul mentions, *Demas* (4:14b). Demas is the only one of Paul’s six companions about whom he says nothing. This silence suggests Paul is concerned about Demas. What heartbreaking fact does Paul write about Demas in 2 Timothy 4:10a–b?

After sharing greetings from his friends, Paul sends *greetings to the brothers at Laodicea* (4:15a), which was only about ten miles west of Colossae. He also sends greetings *to Nympha* (nim'-fah) *and the church in her house* (4:15). Nothing is known about Nympha, or Nymphas, except she hosted a house church, probably in Laodicea.

Paul requests that his letter to the Colossians be read in the church at Colossae and *in the church of the Laodiceans* (4:16a). He also requests the Colossians *read the letter from Laodicea* (4:16). That letter of Paul’s could have been lost or possibly be Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, as some scholars suggest. However, no one knows for sure.

Paul has a word of exhortation for *Archippus* (ar-kip'-pus), “*See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord*” (4:17). The church at Colossae met in the home of Archippus (Philemon 2). He may have been the son of Philemon. We cannot be sure about the *ministry* to which Paul refers.

Paul ends this epistle with three brief statements: *I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand* (4:18a). Paul usually dictated his letters to a scribe and then sometimes ended with a word of greeting in his own handwriting (1 Cor. 16:21 & 2 Thess. 3:17). As Paul stretched out his hand to write this final greeting, the

chains that fastened him to the Praetorian Guard at his side probably hindered him. Therefore, what does he write in 4:18b?

Though Paul was in prison, in *chains*, no power on earth could imprison his ministry. One primary reason was his **great friends**.

Paul ends this letter with the same prayer with which he started it: *Grace be with you* (4:18c & 1:2). It is a prayer that his fellow believers will continue to experience God's unmerited favor. *Grace* is one of God's favorite words, appearing about 130 times in the New Testament. One of the most beautiful uses of the word *grace* is in reference to Jesus Christ. It is John 1:16. Write it below:

The word translated *fullness* (PLĒRŌMA, play'-roh-mah) means superabundance and super completeness. Therefore, in Christ we have more than enough *grace* to meet every need that arises. In other words, the best friend you will ever have is Jesus Christ.

To make great friends: be *faithful*, be *forgiving*, be *soothing*, be *prayerful*, and be *sacrificial*.
(Colossians 4:7–