

○ When hiking, it's important to stay on the trail to avoid getting lost. In 2014 while visiting Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado, 19-year-old Samuel Frappier was hiking or mountain climbing with a friend but got separated along a technical climbing area of the trail down the mountain. He became stuck on a ledge and spent the night shivering on a small rock awaiting his rescue. Frappier later said, "If I slipped just one more foot, then I would have fallen to my death." He was able to use his mobile phone to alert authorities and spent the night on the Broadway ledge, where temperatures dropped below freezing. He said that although he wasn't injured, he didn't have any technical climbing equipment that would enable him to move either up nor down. And so, he awaited rescue.

We come today to the book of Colossians, and false teachers were luring the Christians of Colossae off the path of truth. Departing from the path of truth would not only cause them to succumb to error but walk straight into danger. Paul was keen to help them to stay true to the things that they had been taught.

How grateful are you for your spiritual heritage and your journey into faith? Timothy became a Christian during Paul and Barnabas's first missionary journey. His mum was Jewish and his father Greek. When Paul passed through that same region again a couple of years later, he was so impressed by the growth and maturity that he saw in Timothy that he invited him to join him in his missionary journeys and they became lifelong friends and labourers for the gospel. Hence, he is mentioned by Paul in His greeting to the church at Colossae.

○ V.1, **"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ through God's will, and our brother Timothy, to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae; grace and peace be yours from God our Father."** (1-2)

It's a privilege to serve God together; to serve one another; to serve in humility; to grow and to mature in faith. And so, Paul and Timothy write to the church at Colossae; to the saints; to brothers and sisters in Christ. And like always, Paul desires they know God's grace and peace in their lives. May you too know His peace and grace, and seek to extend grace to one another.

○ Colossae is in modern day Turkey and was an inland town that lay in the Lycus valley on the southern side of the Lycus river. This was a picturesque fertile valley with mountains and streams and there was a general prosperity for those living in the valley that was well known for its high-quality wool production. It was some 200km from Ephesus which was on the main trade route to the coast. It is likely that Ephesus was where Paul lay in prison as he wrote this letter.

The Jewish historian Josephus records that upon the commencement of the Persian Empire almost 600 years prior to Paul's writing, ○ there were some 2000 Jews who were sent from Babylon to the Lycus valley (to Hierapolis, Laodicea, Colossae) to help settle and stabilise the area with the incentive that they were exempt from paying taxes for the next ten years. And so, what we discover is that Colossae at the time of Paul's writing is quite a diverse community, still very regional or rural, but where the church was made up of both Jews and gentiles.

The church at Colossae was not started by Paul, but most likely by Epaphras in the early 50's AD. (Col 1:7) In the late 60s the city was flattened by an earthquake and then rebuilt. Its populations may have increased to around 20,000 before it was abandoned in the 7th and 8th centuries due to Arab invasions. It remains unoccupied to this day and a wonderful site for archaeologists.

Apart from the Lycus river, water was sourced from hot springs in nearby Denizli. But by the time the water arrived via aqueduct the water was now lukewarm. Hence the reference in Revelations to Laodicea and them being lukewarm. Paul writes because he has so much to be thankful for in the reports that he has heard of them, but also out of concern that they are in grave danger of becoming lukewarm – adopting and merging other philosophies and concepts into their Christianity. As we will discover as we move through this little letter. We too are susceptible to adopting and merging worldly philosophies and concepts into our faith walk; to departing from the path of truth.

But Paul begins with thanksgiving and praise. ○ He says, **“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God’s people - the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you.”** (3-5)

“We always thank God when we pray for you.” They don’t pray for them all the time, but when they do, they thank God for them – for their faith in Jesus Christ, and their love for one another. Whether he had a part to play in their development and growth or not – Paul prays; giving thanks. It warms your heart to know that God is answering your prayers and to be thankful is the right and appropriate response. Recently I received an email from my sister Carol, and we are privileged to pray for their work, but then to also hear of the way the Lord is answering those prayers. An evangelist friend of theirs held three conferences in Niger over the past two months and 54 are now new believers in Jesus. Praise the Lord! Likewise, Paul prays for souls won into the Kingdom.

As we will see later in the letter, Paul has reason to raise some real concerns that he has with their life and faith. But that does not stop him from praising God and giving thanks for them. When you see a brother or sister and you have reason to question the way that they live their lives, do you begin in a place of prayer for them, giving thanks for them and their faith? Prayer is always the best place to start because then our response may be tinged with grace from the Lord. There are times when we may need to speak as Paul does through his letter, but there may also be times to simply continue on in prayer for them – always giving thanks for their faith in God.

Last week we were reminded of the natural bent that we have toward racism and discrimination, and we are all prone to both. And within the church family too. Can we endeavour like Paul, to begin in prayer for one another. We may have reason to feel discontent, with others, with our job, with the church, but can we pray – giving thanks for one another? I believe that we honour God when we give thanks, as Paul suggests in Thessalonians, “Give thanks in all circumstances.”

Paul is thankful that they have experienced the grace of God through their faith, hope and love, that has come as result of them responding to the gospel. Wherever the gospel is proclaimed the result is faith, hope and love.

○ He says, **“All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God’s grace. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.” (6-8)**

The gospel bears fruit all around the world; whether in Niger, France, Israel, Colossae, or Toowoomba North; over the back fence or at school. The gospel grows the family of God both numerically and in godly character; faith, hope and love.

○ And so, **“For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you.” (9)**

This is not Paul buttering them up as it were before he comes on “the heavy,” later with words of caution, challenge and conviction. He genuinely cares for them and wants the very best for them. The beginning of chapter 2 reveals his father’s heart for them. Paul comes from a place of humility; realising that we are all sinners – saved by the grace of God. None of us ought to think more highly of ourselves, but keep Christ in the central, supreme place in our thinking; to staying the course; remaining on track. And we’ll come to see that next week. But regardless of his concerns for the folk in the church at Colossae, Paul praises God for them and continues to pray for them. ○ He says, ...

“We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.” (9-12)

How do you know the will of God, live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way? Paul answers that question. The will of God, is that you live a life that is worthy of the Lord, and please Him in all things. Many Christians seek the Lord asking that He reveal His will for them; that it be a certain ministry, gift, or job. “If only I knew what God’s will was for me, then I set about doing it.” Many ask the Lord to reveal His will when it comes to a life partner. These verses declare that the will of God is to live a life worthy of Him and seek to please Him in every way. Regardless of your job or your circumstances, seek to honour the Lord and please Him – that’s His will for you. And He may lead you into something more specific.

Paul then shares how we go about that; how we live our lives worthy of Him and pleasing to Him. **“Bear fruit in every good work, grow in the knowledge of God, be strengthened so that you may have great endurance and patience, and give joyful thanks to the Father.”** To know God! Knowing God will bring about the kind of life that pleases Him. The writer of Proverbs said, **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge”** (Prov 1:7) Right knowledge leads to right behaviour. And Paul’s prayer is that they grow in knowledge of God thereby grow in godly behaviour.

I trust that you can look back over your life and see how you no longer do what you once did – or at least don't do those things near as often – you fall less now.

So, what are you doing to grow in your knowledge of God? I believe that the crux of these first 14 verses is to grow in our knowledge of the Lord. You see, as you do grow in knowledge of God, then you will also be strengthened in your faith and will endure, persevere, stand firm, and be patient.

Paul wanted the Colossian believers to be strengthened with God's power so they would not be pulled away from their faith and their witness into the world; so that they would stay the course and remain on track. Strengthened by the power of God; the Holy Spirit so that you may have endurance, patience and joy as you give thanks. Patience, perseverance and joy should be a natural part of a thankful spirit. Patience in dealing with people, and endurance in dealing with circumstances; not from an endurance from gritted teeth, but from a place of joy.

This of course is the way that God is glorified most; we live worthy of the Lord and please Him. As we grow in our understanding of God, bear fruit, strengthened with endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to our Father.

○ **“For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (13-14)**

Can we commit ourselves to growing in our knowledge of God? In bearing fruit? In persevering and being patient? In being thankful in all circumstances? Why not print out v.9-12 and stick it on the fridge and make it your life's aim?

Hymn “Break Thou the bread of life”