

BLESSINGS FROM CHRIST

EPHESIANS 1:1-23

To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. 11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of his glory. 15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

STEP 1

What are some words or phrases in this passage that stand out to you?
Why do you think these words stand out?

STEP 2

Make a quick list of the activities and descriptive words relating to the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. What does this show you about God's relationship to us? What does it say about His goals for us?

STEP 3

What "blessings from Christ" do you see in this passage?

STEP 4

When you pray, do you pray like Paul prayed in verses 15-19? Who was the subject of his prayers? Who is most often the subject of yours?

STEP 5

Was there something else that stuck out from this passage? Was there something you were inspired or challenged by?

GRACE THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

2 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.] 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

STEP 1

What are some words or phrases that stand out to you from this passage? Why do you think these words stand out?

STEP 2

How would you describe the death that comes from sin? When have you seen it? When have you felt that personally?

STEP 3

How would you describe the life that living with Jesus creates – in spite of any sin/death you may also experience?

STEP 4

What are the three “churchy” words in verse 8. How would you define each and how are they interrelated?

STEP 5

In verse 10 we are described as God’s workmanship (“works of art”). Think of at least three people in your church circle. How are they unique and how are they God’s work of art?

UNITY WITH CHRIST

EPHESIANS 2:11-22

11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— 12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

STEP 1

What would you say is the main theme of these verses? If you could change the topic heading, what would you change it to?

STEP 2

What do you know of your heritage? What is your faith/Christian heritage?

STEP 3

What acts or outward expressions of faith/worship do you prefer (slow or fast music; attending a life group regularly)? For the Ephesians, it was whether or not a person was circumcised? What are some forms of modern legalism the church (and our church) can subtly lean toward?

STEP 4

How interconnected should the church be according to this passage? When you have a disagreement, especially with someone in the church, how hard is reconciliation for you? What does irreconciliation do to the church? What might it prevent (see verses 19-22).

STEP 5

Was there something else that stuck out from this passage? Was there something you were inspired or challenged by?

THE MYSTERY OF THE GOSPEL

EPHESIANS 3:1-13

³ For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— ² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. ⁴ When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. ⁶ This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. ⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, ¹⁰ so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹ This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. ¹³ So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

STEP 1

Paul was oppressed when he wrote this. How difficult is it for you to pursue God and praise Him when you feel oppressed?

STEP 2

How many times does the word “mystery” appear in the passage? What mystery do you think Paul is talking about?

STEP 3

In unveiling this mystery, what part does grace play in it? What part does the church and do you play in that unveiling?

STEP 4

How can we approach God according to verse 12 and what is the only prerequisite to this approach? How confidently and boldly do you approach God? What gets in the way? How may this be a lack of faith?

STEP 5

Verse 6 tells us that this mystery removes lines between Gentiles and Jews. What barriers do you think our community (church and otherwise) still has? How do you contribute to or battle against these barriers?

PRAYING FOR SPIRITUAL STRENGTH

EPHESIANS 3:14-21

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

STEP 1

What are some words or phrases that stand out to you from this passage? Why do you think these words stand out?

STEP 2

Recall what Paul spoke about in Ephesians 2:19-22. How does this influence the way he prays here? What are his underlying views of God and the church?

STEP 3

What two types of power does Paul pray for here? What are the results of the power Paul is hoping for (“so that...”in verse 17 and “to” in verses 18 & 19).

STEP 4

When have you felt/been empowered in your inner being by the Holy Spirit?

STEP 5

In verses 20 and 21, is the power Paul asks for a personal or community empowerment? How often do you pray for “community” strength and power?

UNITY IN THE BODY

EPHESIANS 4:1-16

4 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. 7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."
9 (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? 10 He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) 11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

STEP 1

What qualities would you use to characterize “walking in a worthy manner”? What do you think of the list Paul uses? Do you see Paul’s list lived out alone or in community?

STEP 2

How high of a priority do you think unity in the church was to Paul?
How high of a priority do you think community unity is in our culture today?

STEP 3

Verse 11 has a partial list of spiritual gifts. Go to Romans 12:6-8 for a full list. Where are these gifts to be lived out and for what reasons (verses 12-13)?

STEP 4

What are some of the by-products of reaching unity in the faith and knowledge of Jesus?

STEP 5

Verse 15 mentions speaking the truth in love. Are you more prone to just speak the truth and let it be or keep silent about the truth and let someone in your community discover it for themselves? What does speaking the truth in love actually look like? When have you been spoken to in that way?

THE NEW LIFE OF CHRIST

EPHESIANS 4:17-32

17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. 19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. 20 But that is not the way you learned Christ!— 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. 25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. 26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil. 28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. 29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

STEP 1

After reading the verses, would you give this section a different title?
If you were to add a few sub-headings,, what would they be?

STEP 2

What has been the biggest lie you ever believed? According to this passage, what are some reasons for believing lies (there are 3 each in verse 18 & 19)?

STEP 3

What are some body parts involved in believing lies and believing truth?

STEP 4

Beginning in verse 25, what are some outward marks of living a life with Jesus? How are you doing with that list?

STEP 5

How many references to community can you find in this passage?

WALKING IN LOVE

EPHESIANS 5:1-21

5 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

3 But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. 4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. 5 For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not become partners with them; 8 for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. 13 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14 for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

STEP 1

What is the most honoring thing you have seen someone imitate from you? What was the most horrifying? What is easy for you to imitate from God? What is the most difficult?

STEP 2

Here is another section that has many warnings about how to live in community together. Is this emphasis getting old for you or is it impacting you?

STEP 3

What do you think “partnering” in verse 7 means? Do the verses that follow help you in determining what “partnering” may mean?

STEP 4

How high a sense of urgency would you give verses 15 – 21?

STEP 5

What is most convicting to you from this passage? What is most encouraging?

FAMILY RELATIONS

EPHESIANS 5:22-6:4

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.[a] 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. 33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

6 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

STEP 1

This section moves to family relations. How directly is a healthy family related to a healthy community? What are ways you have seen unhealthy family life affect community life?

STEP 2

What are wives instructed to do in this section? Husbands? Who is the example that has done/is doing both? Since wives get a specific instruction, are they exempt from the husbands' instruction and vice versa?

STEP 3

Verse 31 gives a great summary formula for marriage. What is it? How have you seen this work in marriage?

STEP 4

What are children to do for good and healthy family relations? How is this connected to their future? What are fathers to do and not to do? How can mothers be a part of this, too?

STEP 5

How are you nourishing (v 29) your family? How are you nourishing your church body?

WORK RELATIONS

EPHESIANS 6:5-9

5 Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, 6 not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, 7 rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, 8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. 9 Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him

STEP 1

How often do you think the world goes to the Bible for help in dealing with their jobs and bosses? How often do you?

STEP 2

What would be a modern definition of a bond-servant? How do you react to this instruction to “obey” your boss?

STEP 3

This worker/boss relationship is more than a paycheck. To what does Paul connect it? (v 7)? Do you think of your work place as an extension of your service/worship to Jesus? What will be our bigger “paycheck” if we do?

STEP 4

This section ends with instructions to bosses. What do you do if your boss doesn't do this? Is there an out or an exemption?

STEP 5

Does this section of Scripture have community connections to it? How is the work life connected to the community life?

GOD'S ARMOR

EPHESIANS 6:10-24

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. 16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, 19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

21 So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. 22 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts. 23 Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

STEP 1

Who has been the strongest advocate for you in your life? What did they do? Review Ephesians 1:19-22. What does it mean to you to know Jesus is your strongest advocate – even this very moment?

STEP 2

How real is the unseen spiritual world to you? Use a 1 (low) to 10 (high) scale. What words does Paul use to describe that world?

STEP 3

Why is the spiritual world easy to ignore or forget? How does this play into the hands of the enemy? When you think of schemes and wrestling that are set against you, what does that stir in you?

STEP 4

Which part of the armor is your favorite? Why? Why do you think you need this protection more than the other parts?

STEP 5

In which verse do you see Paul, once again, appealing to community rather than just to personal protection?

ADVANCING THE GOSPEL

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-18

¹ Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.³ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. ¹² I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴ And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. ¹⁵ Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. ¹⁶ The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. ¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

STEP 1

Paul uses a greeting that he uses regularly – “grace and peace.” Do you think these two words are a good summary of the gospel message? How would you define each?

STEP 2

How does Paul feel about the church? What “feeling” words does he use? What words would you use to describe how you feel about your church?

STEP 3

Paul sees his situation as a means to advance the gospel. How often do you see your situation (good or bad) as a means to display the gospel? Think back to a recent “bad” situation. How can grace and peace be incorporated into your story about that situation?

STEP 4

In verse 6, we are encouraged for the future. What is something that is ongoing in your life that you wish would get to the “completion” part? How patient are you in the good work God is doing in and through you?

STEP 5

Verses 9-11 may seem like a prayer for individual excellence, purity, and fruitfulness. Is it individual or community-oriented?

LIVING IS CHRIST

PHILIPPIANS 1:19-30

19 for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, 20 as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. 24 But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again. 27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, 28 and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. 29 For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, 30 engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

STEP 1

What words or phrases stand out to you in the section? Why those words or phrases? What do they cause you to be curious about?

STEP 2

Verse 21 is a popular verse. In Paul's context, death could have been seen as attractive since he was in prison. For you, when life is good, do you share this sentiment? How can you share in it even in the regular day-to-day stuff?

STEP 3

What do you think living in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ would look like? What are some real things you can do this week to live that way?

STEP 4

Verse 29 says we should not stop with belief in Jesus, we should suffer for Him. How have you suffered for Jesus lately – not just been uncomfortable – but really suffered?

STEP 5

As you think of community, what are ways you see your church community living out the last part of verse 27?

THE HUMILITY OF CHRIST

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant[being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

STEP 1

As you have observed people, organizations, communities and life, what would you say about the role of attitude? Do you see humility as an attitude or something else?

STEP 2

Since this is a description of Christ's attitude, it is a new standard for us of what a "good attitude" is. What are some things that stand out to you about it?

STEP 3

What would you tell someone who said, "If I did what these verses describe, I'd become a doormat"? What are some personal rights that are hard for you to surrender?

STEP 4

If Christians took these verses seriously, what types of moods would become uncharacteristic of them? What types of reactions? How would it change a community or a church?

STEP 5

God has blessed Christ for His obedience. What are some ways in which God blesses us for our obedience?

LIVING AS LIGHTS

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-30

12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. 14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. 17 Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. 18 Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me. 19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. 20 For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. 21 For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. 22 But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. 23 I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, 24 and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also. 25 I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, 26 for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. 27 Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. 28 I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. 29 So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, 30 for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

STEP 1

What do you make of verse 12? How does works figure into our salvation if our salvation is based on grace (remember Ephesians 2:8-9)?

STEP 2

This salvation being worked out is addressed to a plural “you” – or work out “you alls” salvation. What other aspects of community do you see in this passage?

STEP 3

Paul is proud of this church and of his counterparts – Timothy and Epaphroditus. Is it okay to be proud like this? What are some safeguards to not having your proudness be prideful?

STEP 4

How are you proud of your church community and individuals in it?
How can you humbly be someone your church community can be proud of?

STEP 5

From Paul’s description of Timothy and Epaphroditus, how do they illustrate Philippians 2:1-4? Which aspects would you like to illustrate more?

CONFIDENCE FROM GRACE

PHILIPPIANS 3:1-11

3 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. 2 Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. 3 For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— 4 though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. 7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

STEP 1

What words or phrases stand out to you in the section? Why those words or phrases? What does it cause you to be curious about?

STEP 2

What do you think of Paul's change of tone in verse 1 compared to verse? What is Paul reacting to? Do you ever react to parts of your faith like this?

STEP 3

Where did Paul place his confidence? How did his accomplishments and his sacrifices fit in with grace?

STEP 4

In addition to grace, what else did Paul consider of greater profit than his flesh or his accomplishments (verse 8)? On a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high), how well do you “know” Jesus?

STEP 5

What confidences of the flesh are distracting you from knowing Jesus better (staying fit, good works, good reputation, doing this study each and every day...)? How do these distractions not only distract you from Jesus, but from your church community?

TENACIOUS FAITH

PHILIPPIANS 3:12-21

12 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. 16 Only let us hold true to what we have attained. 17 Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. 18 For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

STEP 1

Which are you more like: a pioneer (always pushing on) or a settler (settling down)? Which do you think Paul was more like?

STEP 2

Using the imagery of a track race, where does Paul picture himself in the race? How does he equate the race to the spiritual life?

STEP 3

Comparing the progress of your spiritual life to a track race, are you racing, training, observing, or something else?

STEP 4

In the prior passage, legalism was a stumbling block. What are three stumbling blocks in verses 18-19? Are these the same common stumbling blocks of our day and time?

STEP 5

How do you maintain your “heavenly citizenship” (verse 20) but maintain community (especially outside the church) relationships?

LIVING TOGETHER

PHILIPPIANS 4:1-23

4 Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. 2 I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. 3 Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. 4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. 5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. 10 I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. 11 Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me. 14 Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. 15 And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. 16 Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. 18 I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. 19 And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. 21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. 22 All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. 23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

STEP 1

Review Paul's circumstances as he wrote this (Philippians 1:13-14). How do you think that Paul was able to talk of not being anxious? What do verses 6 & 7 tell us to do instead of being anxious?

STEP 2

Verse 8 tells us how can this be more than "putting on rose-colored glasses"? Practically speaking, how can these things counter anxiety and create contentedness? Are all necessary or is one or two enough?

STEP 3

In this passage does Paul seem to you to be: 1)egotistical and independent (vv 11-13); 2)dependent and grateful (vv10, 14-16, 18-20); 3) selfreliant; 4)God-reliant; 5)others-dependent?

STEP 4

What were some things Paul might have been dependent on fellow believers for? What does he especially relish (v 17)?

STEP 5

How are you meeting community (inside and outside the church) needs these days?

BEARING FRUIT

COLOSSIANS 1:1-14

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ² To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. ³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, ⁶ which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, ⁷ just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf ⁸ and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. ⁹ And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. ¹¹ May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

STEP 1

The fruit of the gospel here is faith, love and hope. This fruit was very fruitful! How fruitful is each in your world – the world you live/run in?

STEP 2

How well do you understand God's grace – in all its truth (verses 12-14 have some good hints)? How would you describe it to someone who didn't understand it?

STEP 3

According to verse 9, how are we filled with the knowledge of His will? How has this worked for you when you were trying to figure out what God's will was for you?

STEP 4

How many times does this passage speak of knowledge? Have you ever thought of knowledge of God being so linked to fruitfulness?

STEP 5

What aspects of community do you see in this passage?

THE PREEMI- NENCE OF CHRIST

COLOSSIANS 1:15-23

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. 21 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, 23 if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

STEP 1

Make a list of the things in Jesus' job description. When you first came to know Jesus, how long did it take before you understood His Eminence – that He was not just the Savior, but all these other things as well? What difference does this make to you?

STEP 2

Why did the fullness of God dwell in Jesus? Why did you need to be reconciled? How do you still need it?

STEP 3

What *before (3 things)* and *after (3 things)* story do you see in verses 21-22? Can you name specific *before* and *after* things from your own life?

STEP 4

How do you continue in your faith? When are you tempted to not continue your faith? From verse 23, what are the affects of a lack of faith?

STEP 5

To whom is this gospel available? Paul was obsessed with “ministering” this gospel. To what degree are you?

STRUGGLING FOR THE CHURCH

COLOSSIANS 1:24-2:5

24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, 25 of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, 26 the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. 27 To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. 29 For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. 2 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 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. 5 For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

STEP 1

Access to the Scriptures was always as easy as it is now. What part of the Bible are you most appreciative of? If you didn't have it (the Bible), how would your life be affected?

STEP 2

In what sense are Paul's sufferings a continuation of Jesus' sufferings? If Jesus is at the right hand of the Father, how are Jesus' sufferings continuing?

STEP 3

Paul's suffering was done on behalf of others (the church see verses 1:24 & 2:1). How are you a continuation of Jesus' sufferings by suffering for your church?

STEP 4

In verses 2:3 and 4, what is Paul's concern for the church? When have you been deluded with plausible arguments that got reformed by biblical wisdom and knowledge?

STEP 5

How firm is your faith? What types of things make your faith less firm? What types of things make your faith firmer?

BEING ALIVE IN CHRIST

COLOSSIANS 2:6-23

6 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. 8 See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. 11 In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. 13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. 16 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. 17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. 18 Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, 19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. 20 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— 21 “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” 22 (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? 23 These have indeed 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.

STEP 1

According to verse 7, what are three ways to walk in Christ? How would you define those three things?

STEP 2

In verse 8, there are four worldly ways that conflict with Christ. How have you seen some of these worldly ways show up in our world today?

STEP 3

What kind of “circumcision” is done by Christ (v 11)? How did He do it (vs 12-15)?

STEP 4

In regard to worship or other religious activities, what are ways that you have felt judged by other Christians? What are ways you have felt judgmental toward others in how they “do” or “don’t do” certain religious things?

STEP 5

How has life with Christ truly brought you life? Compare this to the death that sin brings. What are some things that sin has killed? What are some things Jesus has livened?

THE NEW YOU IN CHRIST

COLOSSIANS 3:1-25

3 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. 5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming. 7 In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. 11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. 12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. 18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. 20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. 22 Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. 25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

STEP 1

What are some things that are not from above that you found yourself thinking about this last week? How do you set your mind on things above instead?

STEP 2

There is quite a dirty laundry list in verses 5-9. Which ones creep into your life the most?

STEP 3

In verses 5-9, there is an “already, but not yet” implied. Where do you see this in the verses? Where do you see this in your life?

STEP 4

As you compare the dirty laundry list with the clean laundry list, which words are associated with the individual and which words are associated with community?

STEP 5

These instructions flow right out from the community and into family and work life. Do you think they can flow that easily in real life? What makes them harder at home or at work?

WORKING TOGETHER FOR CHRIST

COLOSSIANS 4:1-18

4 Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. 2 Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. 3 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 that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. 5 Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. 6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. 7 Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. 8 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, 9 and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here. 10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), 11 and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. 12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. 13 For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. 14 Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas. 15 Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. 16 And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. 17 And say to Archippus, “See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.” 18 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

STEP 1

This passage tells us to devote ourselves first to some particular things. What are they? What are two aspects we are to include in our prayer life in verse 2?

STEP 2

How can your outward conversation be seasoned with salt?

STEP 3

Paul speaks much about his friends. What can you tell about how Paul felt about his friends? Are you this type of friend?

STEP 4

What charge does Paul give in verse 16? How does this charge apply to us in our church?

STEP 5

What are the best demonstrations of an integrated, biblically functioning and growing community from this last passage? What of these are you willing to emulate?