

Greetings and Commendation

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[0 : 00] So we are going back into the book of Colossians, and we're going to be in Colossians for quite some time to come. There is a lot there. I was just telling John Weinsneider that my text this morning is the first eight verses of Colossians 1.

I could do five or six sermons out of that easily. Or just do one sermon until four o'clock this afternoon. And I figured that was not a viable option. So we're going to do one sermon, but I want to encourage you to go back into those verses.

And make it your practice every week to go back through those. One other way that I discovered for you to get you into Colossians that's kind of cool.

Now this might freak you out a little bit. Just take a deep breath. But somebody took the English Standard Version of Colossians, which is an excellent translation, put it through AI, and created a hip-hop song version of the entire book of Colossians.

It takes about 12 minutes to go through. And you might be thinking, AI and hip-hop and the Bible, those do not go together. But the fact is, that's not my style of music.

[1 : 15] But it's a rhythm, and it's another way to get it into your ears and to be thinking about it. Check it out. It's on YouTube. We'll put a link in the sermon tab on our website later today.

But it's just another way to get into God's Word. And I found it useful. So if you can get over the fact that it was done with AI and it's hip-hop, well, then you've got a great tool. So to start things off this morning, I want to talk a little bit about a book that came out, I think in the late 70s, early 80s, called *Your God is Too Small*.

And the premise of the book was that when we as believers shrink God to accommodate what we think He's willing to do, we're really missing out.

We pray smaller prayers. We trust God for less of our life. And we really don't attribute to Him what He's truly capable of doing. And as a consequence, we don't obey Him fully.

We don't experience fully the blessing that He makes available to us. Well, yesterday, Arnie and I went to see *The Story of Everything*. I'll tell you what, I think it's showing for another week down in Cedar Rapids and Davenport.

[2 : 29] If you get a chance, you really need to see that movie. *The Story of Everything* is a documentary that is looking at the recent scientific discoveries from the grandest scale, the scope of our universe, and the fact that the universe is expanding all the way down to the microscopic.

What's going on inside of our bodies, inside of our cells, inside of DNA itself. And the entire thrust of the movie is that there has to be a designer.

There has to be. This could not happen by random chance. On the big side, they talked about the fact that the discovery was made that all the celestial bodies are moving away from each other.

The universe is expanding. But that created a problem. Because if it's expanding outward, you can turn around and see that it came from an origin point.

Well, that creates another problem. If there's an origin point, where did that come from? Some scientists arbitrarily decided, no, we don't like that.

[3 : 41] So we're just going to state with authority, because we wear a white lab coat, that the universe is infinitely existent. Forever in the past, forever in the future, it just is.

Well, the math didn't work. The evidence from astronomy didn't work. Physics. They just couldn't deal with it. And ultimately, one of the leading proponents of this, not proponents, but researchers in the origin of the universe, in a conference that he was a speaker, came out of the closet, so to speak, and said, there is no other explanation for the existence of the universe that it began with a supernatural event.

There's no other answer. And then they went inside of DNA, and they talked to computer programmers, who recognize in DNA the same principles that are used in programming for our cell phones or computers, but with one really important difference.

DNA is designed in such a way that it works forward and backwards. It's incredibly sophisticated, and we can't do that.

We're not smart enough. So lucky for us, a time plus chance, put that all together. Wouldn't you say so? No. There has to be a designer. Now, all of this fits into our conversation about Colossians.

[5 : 09] From the very beginning, all the way through, one of the messages that Paul is trying to get across is the supremacy of Jesus Christ. We're going to hit that in a few weeks when we get to the middle of chapter one.

But the latest discoveries of science just continually reaffirm the message that you're going to see emerge from the book of Colossians, that we serve a great God.

And as big as you think God is, he's bigger than that. He's more capable than that. And he's personal. He's involved in the details, down to the minutiae.

He's invested. He's engaged in what he's doing in our lives. He's personal, as we're going to see in Colossians, and he loves us individually. We have got to get these truths into our heads.

Because as we come to grasp them to the degree that we can, it will literally change our lives. It'll give us great boldness to step out, taking the risk of obedience, because we're not doing it on our own.

[6 : 22] I heard an illustration this week when the San Francisco Bay Bridge was being built. They had a problem. Workers kept falling off and dying. And I think that was before workman's compensation insurance, so it was even more tragic.

Well, the city decided, let's put a safety net in. What a novel idea. Well, they put in the safety net, and they ceased losing life.

But in addition, it gave the workers more confidence to do their jobs, to be working along that huge structure, because if they fell, they knew that they would be okay.

This truth of Jesus' identity as a creator of all things, with the wisdom and the skill and the insight to create things of such marvelous complexity, is our safety net.

And we need to rest and trust in that. So turn to Colossians chapter 1. We're going to read that together, and then plunge into the chapter. I'll give you a second turn to Colossians chapter 1.

We're going to be in verses 1 through 8.

[7 : 31] All right, so read along with me. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae, grace to you and peace from God our Father.

We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel which has come to you.

Just as in all the world also, it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth.

Just as you learned it from Epiphros, our beloved fellow bondservant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf. And he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.

So let's pray together. God, you know, as I watched the credits roll in that movie yesterday, I was just awestruck by your magnitude, who you are, and how weak my faith is.

[8 : 54] When I see that I am truly fearfully and wonderfully made, and that the universe is fearfully and wonderfully made, and that all things were designed by you, created by you, and are sustained by you, it just makes me wonder why I ever doubt, why I ever fear.

And Lord, I pray that as we begin this conversation about Colossians, as we start talking about your will for us, and your work in our lives, that we would be built up in our faith, that we would recognize that we serve a great God, that we carry a great message, and that we can truly be your tools to make a difference in the world.

God, I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. So we're going to take a little bit of a stroll down memory lane. We're going to look at the very first phrase of the chapter. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother.

So let's refresh our memories about Paul. Do you recall? His birth name, if you will, was Saul. He was a Pharisee, one of the premier students of the premier teacher of that era in Jewish history. Gamaliel was his tutor. And Paul was this zealous, faithful, aggressive defender of the Jewish faith. [10:17] And it compelled him to take leadership in the persecution of the church. We first see him appear at the stoning of Stephen. If you recall, Stephen gets called on the carpet for sharing the gospel.

He gives this great sermon in Acts chapter 7. He's stoned at the end of chapter 7. And then chapter 8, verse 1 begins with, And a young man named Saul was holding the coats for the people so they could throw stones and kill Stephen.

So from that humble beginning, he took on the task of purifying the Jewish community and getting rid of the sect of Christians.

Well, Jesus has a funny sense of humor. And it seems like those who are most determined to be his opponents end up being brought onto our team.

And Paul was the first of those. You recall the story? Paul is going up to Damascus with a letter from the high priest to go into the synagogues and drag out and imprison anybody who names the name of Jesus Christ as their Savior.

[11:30] And along the way, a bright light shines down. He's knocked off of his donkey. And he has a one-to-one conversation with Jesus. Why are you persecuting me? I have great plans for your life.

Let me show you what I'm going to do. And he strikes Paul blind. Paul is taken to Damascus. He's healed. By the way, as a side note, I think Ananias was the name of the man who healed Paul and delivered the charge for Paul's life.

When God appeared to Ananias and said, hey, there's this guy Paul, Ananias says, yeah, I know who he is. You're going to strike him with lightning, right? And that's not in the Bible.

I made that part up. But God says, I want you to go heal him and tell him I have plans for his life.

And Ananias says, are you crazy? That's not quite in the Bible either, but it's kind of a subtext where Ananias challenges God and says, you're really going to send me to Paul?

We're talking about the same guy, right? Or Saul, excuse me. You're going to send me to Saul?

We're talking about the same guy? And the Lord says, yeah, trust me. And Ananias obeys.

[12:43] You know, I've talked a lot and we'll continue to talk about wrestling with God. That is an example of wrestling with God. You want me to do what? Okay, I'll obey.

What if Ananias had not obeyed? We don't know because he did. And Lord willing, each of us will obey when we're called to go and do something.

So Ananias heals Paul, Saul. He becomes Paul. We're not going to go through his whole life, but he becomes the mouthpiece for the gospel to the Gentiles.

He has this huge role. He writes a significant portion of the New Testament and God uses him in a powerful way. When he's writing the book of Colossians, this is right after the book of Acts ends in Acts 28.

Paul is sent to prison. This is his first of two imprisonments in Rome. He's imprisoned in Rome. He's shackled to a guard and he's writing a letter. And he writes to the Ephesians, the Colossians, to Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

[13:49] And we also know that he wrote a letter to Laodicea. Those are called the prison epistles. And those are sent out to these baby churches as Paul's in prison. And then later he's released.

He has a few more years of fruitful ministry. Eventually he ends up back in Rome and is executed.

He's martyred for the faith. We know that information from the book of Timothy.

So where we are now, Paul is in prison. It's important to remember that he was called by God. He was an apostle, a sent one.

That's what apostle means. He was a sent one of Jesus Christ by the will of God. We're going to go back to that. So let's talk about Timothy. In Acts chapter 16, Paul is in Lystra and Derby, a couple of small towns in Central Asia, in modern day Turkey.

Timothy and this young man who is of mixed race, he's half Jewish, half Greek, is just very promising. And Paul is impressed with him, takes him on as a protege, as an apprentice.

[14:53] And he is circumcised just to validate that he is a Jew. And then he becomes Paul's protege as Paul goes on missionary journeys and does his work traveling over the course of his life.

Timothy becomes a very important person. If you think to your table of contents in your Bible, you know there's two books that bear Timothy's name, 1 and 2 Timothy.

Those weren't written by Timothy, they were written to Timothy. That young man that Paul took as his apprentice became a church planter, and not really a church planter so much as a missionary to the churches in Asia, starting in Ephesus, and his job was to defend the faith against false doctrine. We read that in Timothy, in the books of Timothy. And then his job also was to identify and appoint elders in each of the churches. He was the bridge, literally.

Timothy was a bridge between the people who were eyewitnesses of what happened in Jesus' life, death, burial, and resurrection, and us.

[16:08] The generations that came after those eyewitnesses died. Let me give you an idea of how important Timothy was. I just finished it, or I'm in the middle of, no, I just finished.

I read my Bible every day, and still I can't remember where I'm at. So I just finished reading the book of Judges. What's interesting about the beginning of the book of Judges is that one of the things that's noted is that all the people who had gone through the wilderness and then entered the Holy Land had died.

The eyewitnesses of the manna, of the pillar of fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day, of seeing God work to protect the people in the wilderness, that generation was gone.

And the next generation didn't receive from their forebears, from their parents and grandparents and great-grandparents, or actually just their parents, their great-grandparents died, from their parents, they didn't receive a clear explanation of the faith.

You know what the theme of Judges is? Every man did that which was right in his own eyes. They walked away from God because there wasn't a Timothy. Praise God for Timothy because if it wasn't for Timothy, we could have ended up like the judges and Christianity would have died.

[17:36] But God knew better and he planted Timothy in that role. Very important person. And you see here in Colossians, Paul is intentionally recognizing him, Timothy our brother, to prepare those churches to know Timothy has the Apostle Paul's seal of approval.

So that in the years to come, when Timothy had to exercise authority, he was equipped, he was ready, and the people were willing to accept him because he had received that, he received Paul's blessing.

So Timothy's an important player here. So Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother. So let's talk about God's will. And to set us up for a conversation about God's will, I'm going to take you back to a concept that we're going to continue to reinforce.

Remember I talked a few weeks ago about the left brain and the right brain? There's complicated thinking and complex thinking, complicated problems, complex problems.

The complicated, the things we deal with in our left brain, are things that we can figure out, we can solve. I can figure out how to make my phone communicate with the printer in the back and print my sermon notes on Sunday mornings.

[18:55] Some days it works, some days it doesn't. It's kind of a roll of the dice. But I can solve the problem. I can troubleshoot, I can figure it out. Hannah and I figured out this morning how to print off some paperwork out of the software that we use for our directory.

We can figure it out. That's a complicated problem. We want to live there and this is a very important piece to keep in mind as we talk about the will of God in the weeks ahead.

Our natural inclination is to be problem solvers. And I think that's by God's design. But the problem is that there are parts of our life, significant parts of our life, that are complex.

They don't have an ABCD formulaic solution that we can figure out. We can't just discern what is the will of God for us, for example.

That is something that's lived out. That's why discipleship isn't in a manual. We make disciples by apprenticing people just like Timothy was apprenticed to Paul.

[20:01] The will of God is a complex problem. We learn the will of God as we walk with God, as we're rooted in relationship with God, He reveals His will to us.

That's the only way to figure it out. Every young person that's a Christian at some point asks the question, what is God's will for my life? I can remember doing that.

There's this book called Decision Making in the Will of God. It's got like 800 pages in it. I got it when I was a senior in high school. It was of almost no value because, for one thing, I wasn't going to sit down and read 800 pages, but it just didn't help.

It didn't get the point across to me. What has emerged now that I look back from the lofty perch of a 60-year-old is God's will was worked out in my life as I obeyed the things that were clear for me to do, the things that we talk about in our core values, to decide to be a follower or apprentice of Jesus, to choose to love God and cultivate that love, to love others, to make disciples, to seek unity with other believers.

The will of God for my life emerged out of that because it's a complex problem. We need to keep that in mind. But the other question is, what do we mean when we say, what is the will of God? [21 : 19] Is it just God's plan for your life? Is it just God's plan for the universe? What do we mean by the will of God? Because, again, we look at it from a complicated perspective.

The will of God is basically we think of as a to-do list and a calendar. Right? But that's not what it is. God's will, we're going to see in the weeks ahead, is His intention.

His intention for us, how He wants us to live out our lives, not as a to-do list, but the type of character we have, the way we react with other people, interact with them.

And in that context, it becomes a complex problem that we learn as we walk with Him. Now, in this immediate context, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, that was a specific thing. God's plan was to make Saul, convert him, change his name to Paul, and make him an apostle, a sent one, one of the 13 chosen eyewitnesses to proclaim the gospel to the world and lay the foundation for the rest of us.

[22 : 28] That was God's will for his life. But you're going to see as we go that God's will is more than that for Paul, and it's more than that for us. One of the reasons that this is a theme in the book of Colossians is that Colossians was written to address a heresy that was beginning to percolate in the area of the seven churches that you see in the book of Revelation, that part of the world, what is now Turkey and Asia, is a heresy of Gnosticism.

I'm not going to go into it in depth today. I'm just going to give you one key piece. Gnostics believe that there is specialized knowledge that is difficult to acquire, and only the select few attain to that knowledge.

They're the gurus. They're the ones that we go to and we genuflect and hope that they will give us some of their hard-won wisdom. Brothers and sisters, that is not the teaching of the New Testament.

When we were in Seattle, I was working with a group of young people, young people being late teens to early 20s, and these were Christians, and there was this idea percolating in this group of Christians in Seattle, and they were very spiritual about it, with big air quotes.

Oh, we can't really know the truth. We can't really know it. So, we're not going to pursue it. We're not going to study.

[24 : 06] We're not going to learn, because we can't know. And aren't I spiritual for acknowledging that I'm just not smart enough to understand God's will? people. And I was pretty worked up and pretty harsh with some of these guys.

Like, no, no, I'm sorry. If that was true, you wouldn't need a Bible. Or Jesus said in the Gospel of John, I'm sending another comforter, helper, a paraclete, to walk with you and to reveal to you the truth.

This stuff's knowable. So, get off your high horse, engage your brain, and get to work. We can know things. Are there things that we can't understand? Oh, yeah. No question.

About half of that movie I watched yesterday, I was in the deep end of the pool with lead weights around my ankles. I didn't understand. But there are broad swaths of the will of God that are accessible to us, made accessible to us, by virtue of the fact that we have the Holy Spirit indwelling in us if we're in Christ, and we have His truth.

What I confronted my young friends with was, brothers and sisters, you are intellectually lazy. You don't want to pick up this book because it's kind of hard, and it's thick. That's a lot of pages.

[25 : 26] Colossians in my Bible is on page 1401. And then if you're going to get into some of the weeds and read C.S. Lewis or Francis Schaeffer, or some of these great thinkers, Augustine, that's tough sledding.

Do it. Engage your brains. We can know the will of God and that is something that we have got to get a hold of. What Paul is going to hammer and continue to bring to the point in Colossians is God's will is revealed and understandable.

You can know it. Number two, it's accessible to all, not just the spiritual elites. You don't have to come to me or to John or to Tim or to Jack to get a specialized dispensation of what God's will for your life is.

You have direct access to God himself. Now, is it wise to consult people? Yes. But, fortunately for you, I am not the repository of God's will for your life.

You would be in serious trouble. God's will is accessible to all of us. And I just want to keep reiterating and we're going to come back to this. We're going to cover it in depth next week because it's a centerpiece of Paul's prayer for the Colossian church and we're going to continue to come back for it because Paul is taking down this Colossian heresy, this idea that there's specialized knowledge.

[26 : 54] And make no mistake, Gnosticism is alive and well in 21st century America. You need to know this stuff because you will be confronted by it. This idea that a person in a lab coat with a pocket protector and a lot of pens or somebody in whatever profession has got specialized knowledge and we have to defer to them or their spiritual knowledge that we don't have access to.

That is alive and well in the present day. We need to know this stuff from the book of Colossians. So that's the will of God. Keep that in mind. I just want you to we're putting down foundations as we go forward in the coming weeks.

Now verse 2 Paul says to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae. The question I thought of as I was looking at this was who's Paul talking to?

Now we live in a predominantly Catholic community. In a Catholic church they elevate people to sainthood. It ain't easy to be a saint. You have to demonstrate a walk with God.

You have to demonstrate that miracles were done through you. There's a long vetting process. I think you have to be dead. And it's a long process and not everybody's called a saint.

[28 : 13] Mother Teresa almost didn't make the cut. Mother Teresa! Mother Teresa! But you know what? We all make the cut.

Stop and think about that. You make the cut. You are a saint. We are the saints.

The word saint literally means something that is or someone that is set apart for a holy purpose. That's part of God's will for you. You have been made holy not by anything that you did but by the work of God through Christ on the cross.

You were declared righteous. It says that in Romans 5. And because of that you have been set apart for a purpose. And part of your life's work is to discover that purpose.

Because remember the will of God is knowable. So Paul was writing to the saints and the faithful brethren but was he writing to two groups? Are there the saints? Everybody.

[29 : 17] And then the guys who are the starters or the first chair who are the faithful brethren. And that I would say no.

I think he's looking at the church of Colossae looking at the congregation in his mind's eye because he's writing from Rome but he's thinking about them. He says, okay, you are the saints and the faithful brethren.

When he calls them saints what he's reminding them of you are where you are. You are who you are because of God's work in your life in your behalf.

It's looking at it from the perspective of God's work in you. And then faithful brethren is turning the coin to the other side and saying you have a response that's expected because you're a saint.

And what is that? In this context it's faithfulness. He's saying you are the faithful brethren. You are a body of people.

[30 : 19] You're a family. You're a brotherhood of people who are faithful to God because of the work that he did in you. It's a both and not an either or.

So I want to take a second turning your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 5. I love this passage in 2 Corinthians.

And we're going to start in verse 14. For the love of Christ I mean there's a whole network of sermons here too but I don't have time.

For the love of Christ controls us having concluded this that one died for all that's Jesus therefore all died. You died. That's an important concept in Paul's writing.

Each of us that's in Christ is we died. And he died for all so that they who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who died and rose again on their behalf.

[31 : 24] That's that response we talked about. You're a saint because you died in Christ and you're called to be a faithful brother or sister in response.

That's the new life that comes because of the work that Jesus did. Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh even though we have known Christ according to the flesh yet now we know him in this way no longer.

Therefore if anyone is in Christ if you have accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior if you have acknowledged his death on the cross for you turned away from your own way of doing things turning to following where he leads if you've made that decision you are a new creature.

You're new. Therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creature the old things passed away behold new things have come.

New things have come. I want to emphasize something. There's a theology that I vehemently disagree with and it sounds very humble I'm just a sinner saved by grace.

[32 : 36] That's not false but it's not complete. And I would argue when someone says I am a sinner saved by grace that's the mistake because that should be past tense.

Do we still sin? Absolutely. I'm not saying we're sinless but I was a sinner saved by grace. but I am a new creature in Christ.

We see that worked out in Romans chapter 7. Paul said I do the things I don't want to do and I don't do the things that I want to do who will deliver me from the body of this death?

Therefore there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because the spirit of the law of life in Christ Jesus that is giving us life.

but there's a war within our nature. But before Christ there wasn't any war. We were dead in trespasses and sins. But brothers and sisters we have got to live in newness of life.

[33 : 36] That's what Paul is talking about when he says to the saints and faithful brethren Colossi you are a new creature in Christ. You are capable and expected to live in a new way under a growing understanding of what the will of God is.

So let's go back to Colossians. So what does it mean to be faithful? So I found this book that was really interesting. It was written by a businessman in the 80s that noticed he was a Christian man noticed that at work nobody talked about Jesus at all.

The science of management was really beginning to gain momentum through the 80s. And there's a lot of really good research done. But there was no attribution within the study on business ethics about biblical morality or the role that Jesus and the Holy Spirit played in forming good business practices.

There was like this giant wall between the two. And he got curious about that. And so he started on this quest and what it centered on was what is faithfulness? And he used as his approach there was a famous management book called In Search of Excellence.

And these guys had written a book it's still used today in business schools. What is excellence in business? And they had a very prescribed research process. Well, this Christian man William Deal took that same methodology to say, where is faithfulness?

[35 : 12] And what does this look like? And if my faith doesn't find expression in my business life, in my work life, am I faithful? So, he started out with a definition.

I lost my place here. Started with a definition. Acknowledging God's graceful relationship with us by striving to grow more Christ-like in our daily lives. That's his definition of faithfulness.

Acknowledging God's graceful relationship.

You could also say, I almost rewrote it, but I didn't want to change his words. Acknowledging God's grace-filled relationship with us. We experience God's grace every step of the day if we just pay attention.

So, we're acknowledging that. So, remember, saints, you're a new person in Christ. Now, this is a response. We're acknowledging God's graceful relationship with us by striving to grow more Christ-like in our daily lives.

In other words, in every part of our daily life. Now, does that sound familiar? If you're paying attention, Martha tipped my hand a little bit. Go ahead and do that slide now, Martha, because I couldn't figure out how to get to pull in our the pretty slide that Libby did, so I just gave you an ugly one.

[36 : 30] But the words are what matter. We exist to glorify God, walking closely with Him, striving together to become more like Jesus every day.

That is our mission statement. We are becoming faithful. So, what is faithfulness? Deal identified seven different areas. And I'm just going to go through them really quick for time's sake.

And they build on one another. The first one is a relationship with Jesus and an identity that's rooted in Jesus. First, it's a relationship with Him.

We have to recognize that. When I quote Romans 5.1, therefore, having been justified by faith, if we stop there, that's about the same relationship as I might have with a judge if I'm appearing in court. Not much of a relationship. There's no relationship there. That's just a forensic term. It's a legal term. I'm declared righteous. I am declared to have the righteousness of God in Christ.

[37 : 38] Therefore, having been justified by faith, but the next phrase is, we have peace with God. We have peace with God.

And peace, shalom, the whole well-being that we experience can only be found in relationship. So it goes far beyond just a legal relationship between the condemned and a judge and becomes more like the relationship between the prodigal son and his father where we're welcomed in, a party is thrown, and we're restored back to our original position.

Isn't that awesome? So it's a relationship with God. Faithfulness is rooted in relationship with God, and it's an identity that's rooted in Christ. What does that mean? When you say, I am a Christian, pause for a second and think of what that word meant.

When the people of Antioch were pointing fingers at the early church and making fun of them, they were saying, you are little Christs. You are little echoes of Jesus.

That's an identity rooted in Christ. When I was a youth pastor in Michigan, Southwest Michigan is almost entirely Dutch. I think the day I was hired, I heard for the first of a million times, if you ain't Dutch, you ain't much.

[39 : 05] To which I replied, because I'm a smart aleck, if you're just Dutch, you're out of touch. But I heard this all the time.

Well, I'm really cheap because I'm Dutch. Dutch. I'm set in my ways because I'm Dutch. I have this behavior because I'm Dutch. They identified as Dutch.

Even though the kids I knew had been in, their families had been in America for generations. I'm Dutch and this defines who I am. Is your identity rooted in Christ? Are you who you are because of your relationship with Jesus?

And if not, why not? If not, why not? Your identity is rooted in Christ. We're going to come back to that question, by the way. So the next feature is a growth mindset.

Well, gee, John, that sounds like you pulled that right out of psychology and business textbooks. I did, but they took it from the Bible. God's expectation for you is that you would grow.

[40 : 10] We are striving together to become more like Christ every day. I have a sculpture in my home that is a man struggling and the top half is crystal.

The bottom half is bronze. It's a reminder that I am in Christ.

I'm a new creature in Christ. But there's also a sanctification process that I am engaged in battling within myself by the power and enablement of the Holy Spirit to bring about change, to grow.

Growing to become more like Christ. You've got to have that mindset, that expectation. If you're content with where you are today or you look back on your past and you say, you know what? That day back in 2001, I really had it figured out and I've been living my life based on that conclusion ever since.

You're dead. Or you might as well be. God's expectation is that we continue to grow. That we bear fruit. That's John 15. He expects us to grow.

[41 : 23] So a faithful person has a growth mindset. As Guinness put it really well in his book, The Call. I'm not going to read to the whole quote, but he talked about the fact that we in Christ should have an entrepreneurial mindset.

We should be looking at the resources that we have and thinking of ways to multiply those resources to expand our kingdom impact in the world. That's what Jesus taught in the parable of talents. He gave one guy in Luke 1 and he produced 5.

That's a 500% return on investment. That's a growth mindset. And I challenge you to look at life that way. The next characteristic is prayer. Because we don't do it alone.

You don't produce a 500% return on investment for the Lord by yourself. We all know stock brokers are really proud of a 10% return on investment.

Jesus says, that's it. We only get that by prayer. By interacting with God and allowing Him to speak into our lives. To listen and to get our marching orders. The next one is interesting that he found in his research.

[42 : 26] As he's looking at, Deal was looking at in the Christian community, how does the Christian community identify faithful people? This next one is faithful people live in community.

They have a rich network of relationships of people that they support and are supported by. We don't live in isolation. We were created social beings.

We have got to live that way. We need each other. Paul used the analogy of a body in 1 Corinthians 12. We work together.

Paul again used the analogy of a building in Ephesians 4. We work together. We have to be living in community. So, we have a relationship with Jesus and our identity is rooted in Him.

We have a growth mindset. We are people who pray. We live in community. We're a generous people. I've talked at times about creating margin. Set aside time and money that is just the Lord's.

[43 : 32] So that if a need pops up, you can pull out your wallet and go, no problem, I got you covered. You don't call up the church and say, hey, can you give so-and-so? No, just do it. Just do it.

Your coworkers, family members, people you know, your neighbors, or you pitch in and you help with whatever their need is. You're scanning around you to see, where can I help somebody? Where can I bless somebody? Faithful people are generous. Faithful people have a bias to look for need and to step into that need, which is weirdly scary.

And I say that truly. It took me years to overcome the reluctance because I thought people would think I was weird. Nobody has accused me of being weird when I've offered to help. Ever.

Faithful people are generous. Step into it. Little things. You see a mom who's got a baby carrier and a diaper bag and a toddler and a baby, open the door.

[44 : 37] What a novel idea. But look for those opportunities. Faithful people are generous. There's a sense of justice. Faithful people know right from wrong, which makes sense.

One of the things that's really clear when the Bible talks about knowing God, almost always the knowledge of God, relational knowledge, is joined to people who practice righteousness, who do good things.

The people who know their God display strength and take action, Daniel said. In Jeremiah, I'm just going to paraphrase this, Jeremiah said, let not him, don't boast in your wealth, don't boast in your strength, don't boast in your intelligence, boast in this, that you know me.

I am a God of righteousness and justice. Micah said, what is good and what is required of you, oh man, to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God?

That's faithfulness. We stand up for the downtrodden. And I'm going to maybe step on some toes here, but that doesn't mean we go to a protest or that we join a boycott.

[45 : 54] That's kind of weak. You know what really takes courage? To stand up to your boss because he did wrong to somebody, to a co-worker. To stand up for injustice, to stand up for the weak, in the moment, personally.

That takes courage. It's scary. But that's what Christian people do. William Wilberforce gave his life to end slavery in the British Empire.

Slavery was ended. The bill was passed, became law the day before he died. His sense of justice, his faithfulness, drove him to oppose evil.

That's what faithful people do. Big ways, small ways, we stand against evil. And then, interestingly, the last thing was, is there's a simplicity of lifestyle.

We don't have all the flashy stuff. You know, I joke about wanting a Maserati. I don't need a Maserati. I would like one. It'd be fun to drive.

[47 : 11] But I don't need one. Faithful people have a simple lifestyle. Why? Because a simple lifestyle opens the door for generosity. It opens the door for the other things if we have a simple lifestyle. So these are the characteristics of faithful people.

So where do we go from here? You said, wait a minute, John, you just covered a verse and a half and you read eight verses. Well, your homework assignment is twofold.

Number one, on the back of the bulletin where there's notes, at the bottom, you're going to start seeing this every week, is a homework assignment. This week, it's to think about faithfulness and how am I faithful? How do I display faithfulness in the world around me?

And spend some significant time in these following verses that I didn't get to in Colossians chapter one. But there's some takeaways that I want to talk about. Remember the will of God is knowable. Commit to grow in your understanding of God's will and to obey what he tells you to do. To rest in it. Think about faithfulness.

[48 : 15] Faithfulness is one of the fruit of the Spirit. Along with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, goodness. I got them all not in the right order.

I don't think the order matters. But faithfulness is one of those fruits of the Spirit. So, let me tell you what happens if you identify an area where you're not faithful. This is really important. Do not, do not go to the left side of your brain and come up with a checklist of things you need to do to be more faithful because God will make God happy.

No, you just create a new law. Don't do that. If you identify in your life an area, you know what, I'm not faithful here. My light is under a bushel when I'm at work.

For example. Do not come up with a checklist. I'm going to witness to somebody one time a day or I'm going to read my Bible in front of other people or I'm going to loudly pray before I eat my lunch. No. Turn to the Lord. Faithfulness is fruit of the Spirit. And your lack of faithfulness is like a check engine light on your dashboard that's saying something's lacking.

[49 : 31] Turn to the Lord, ask Him, Lord, what am I missing? What do I need to learn? Where do I need to grow in this area? And what did Jesus say when He promised the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit will reveal truth to you. I'll tell you. But take that problem you identify and recognize it's a complex problem that you work out in conversation with the Lord as the Holy Spirit works it out in you.

So, look for the will of God, be faithful, and then here's the last. Go back to Colossians chapter 1.

Find my place here because the way I wrote it in my notes doesn't make sense.

So, Paul said, starting in verse 4, since we heard of your faith, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints because of the hope laid up for you in heaven of which you previously heard in the word of truth the gospel which has come to you just as in all the world also.

This is important. Just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God and truth just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved bondservant who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf.

[50 : 52] What do we see there? Those men and women who were living faithfully as saints faithful in their following of God were bearing fruit.

They loved each other. They were rooted in hope. The church was growing. The influence of the church was expanding exponentially across Asia.

Why? Because they were the saints the faithful in Christ Jesus who are following what they have been told to do. They were being obedient.

They were being faithful. That's what we want at Tri-State Community Church. We're not going to come up with fancy marketing campaigns. We're not going to do a lot of the things that churches do with the best of intentions to drum up enthusiasm and motivation and activity to reach the community.

Now what we're going to do is we're going to turn to Christ. We're going to look at our risen Savior and say, Lord, what do you want us to do? How do you want us to live?

[52 : 02] What does that look like in our community? In our relationships relationships that we already have contact with, how do you want to be expressed there through me?

And as we do that, we're not dependent on my ability to come up with a marketing campaign because we'd be in trouble because God is directing the work, but we will see fruit.

But it's rooted, it's rooted in pursuing the will of God, in owning the fact that we're saints and allowing that to produce faithfulness in our lives.

That's when we get to see the fun stuff happen. Let's pray together. Father, thank you that you reveal your will to us, that we can know you, that's part of your will, that you would be known.

The Lord, we can know that you want us to become more like you. We can know that you want us to go and make disciples. We know that you want us to love each other. God, help us to live in that way.

[53 : 13] And Lord, I pray that we would be people who are growing, who are intentional about growing in our relationship with you and allowing you to produce yourself and produce your fruit in us.

God, I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.