

GROWING IN CHRIST

Leader pages on pp. 138-141

THE POINT:
WE SHOULD ENCOURAGE AND HELP ONE ANOTHER GROW IN CHRIST.

COLOSSIANS 1:9-14,21-29

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⁹ For this reason also, since the day we heard this, we haven't stopped praying for you. We are asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding,
¹⁰ so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God,
¹¹ being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, so that you may have great endurance and patience, joyfully
¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the saints' inheritance in the light. ¹³ He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.

MEMORY VERSE

¹⁴ In him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

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²¹ Once you were alienated and hostile in your minds as expressed in your evil actions. ²² But now he has reconciled you by his physical body through his death, to present you holy, faultless, and blameless before him –
²³ if indeed you remain grounded and steadfast in the faith and are not shifted away from the hope of the gospel that you heard. This gospel has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and I, Paul, have become a servant of it.

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

KEYWORDS

Filled (v. 9)—Being filled means “to be controlled” by God’s Spirit.

Walk (v. 10)—In the Bible, the word *walk* usually describes a person’s lifestyle. In this context, verses 10-14 describe how the believer should live in obedience to God.

Holy, faultless, blameless (v. 22)—The Greek term for: *holy* – to being set free from sin and set apart with a purpose; *faultless* – to being pure or innocent, faultless refers to without blemish; *blameless* – the behavior of believers, especially leaders, being free from accusation blameless.

WHY DO WE NEED OTHERS TO MATURE IN CHRIST?

In today's society, there are various companies that specialize in tracing the genealogy of families. In doing so, they seek to help people discover their ancestors, traditions, culture, origins, and history. This information, in many cases, provides the individual or family, a sense of identity. For years this research was done through word of mouth, photos and family records. Through technological advancements this work is now done digitally. Ancestry.com started in 2012 and enables its subscribers to trace their family back many generations. It is safe to say that users will either be elated or disappointed in who they are related to.

As Christians, our worth is not connected to the type of genealogy that can be searched through a website. Our identity is found in Christ. We can boldly proclaim that Christ has given us a new identity. We are now forgiven, loved, cared for, etc., because of the Lord Jesus. Through Him, we learn we are more than the external—our career, economic status, or appearance. We know that we are chosen ones, dear children of God, His sheep, children of light, vessels of honor, and heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ (Rom 8:17). What a sense of worth we have in knowing that we have such a strong identity!

We Need Others to Pray for Us

// Colossians 1:9-14

No apostle was more passionate about winning souls for Christ than Paul. From the time he encountered the risen Savior on the road to Damascus, Paul was a man on fire to spread the gospel. He traveled approximately 10,000 miles spreading the Good News, and he considered it his calling to evangelize the Gentiles.

But Paul wasn't content merely to win converts and start churches. He was also passionate about nurturing disciples to become mature Christ-followers. For example:

- Paul returned to churches he had started to continue teaching them (1 Cor. 11:34b; 1 Thess. 3:10).
- The large portion of the New Testament Paul authored consists of letters he wrote to teach, correct, and encourage his readers for their spiritual growth.
- Paul's letters often include his written prayers for his readers. And these prayers, like the one in this passage, focused on deepening their relationship with Christ.



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In verse 9, Paul began with the phrase, "For this reason," referring to the verses immediately before. There, Paul mentioned that he had heard from Epaphras, who had told him about the Colossians' faith in Jesus and love for the saints (vv. 4,13). This was why Paul and Timothy continued praying for the Colossians. Believers there were already making great strides in their spiritual development. Paul wanted to see them go farther and deeper.

False teachings were making inroads into the Colossian church. Paul had heard about these heretical teachings and was writing to set the record straight. He wanted his readers to grow in spiritual wisdom and discernment, so they could easily separate truth from error. Note the word ("filled") used in reference to knowing God's will. Fullness is a key concept throughout this letter. It conveys the idea of being fully equipped. In ancient times, the word could be used to describe a ship ready for sailing.

The purpose of knowing God's will is so we can follow it. Paul spelled out what that means in verse 10:

- Walking worthy of the Lord
- Living to please Him
- Bearing the fruit of good works
- Continuing to grow in knowledge of God

In other words, spiritual growth means we are continually transformed to act, talk, and think less like our unredeemed selves and more like Jesus. Spiritual maturity is not about rule-keeping or earning God's approval with good deeds. It's about living out our love relationship with Jesus by imitating Him in every way. We live to please God not in order to earn His forgiveness but out of gratitude because He has already forgiven us (vv. 12-14).

WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICES THAT HAVE HELPED YOU GROW IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?

We Need Others to Ground Us //

Colossians 1:21-23

In verses 21-23, Paul continued discussing his concerns for his readers' spiritual growth. He wanted them to remain "grounded and steadfast" and not shift away from their hope in Christ. Another aspect of helping professing believers grow to maturity is guiding them to stick with what they started, to continue in the faith and not get side-tracked.

Verse 21 appears to pick up where Paul left off in verse 14. He interrupts himself in verses 15-20 with a sidebar of sorts on the



DIGGING DEEPER BELIEVE GOD

Paul stated, "Since the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but are powerful through God for the demolition of strongholds. We demolish arguments every proud thing that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). Applying this verse to a Christian's identity, we must take every thought that goes against who Christ says that we are in Him and demolish them and see ourselves the way God sees us. In Romans 5:10, the writer states that God loved us even when we were "enemies." Saints were chosen by Him before the world was made (Eph. 1:4). Ephesians 4:32 teaches us that we are now forgiven. Christians are no longer imprisoned or under the dominion of sin and Satan because through Christ, we are redeemed (1 Pet. 1:18-19). And lastly, believers have been adopted into the family of God (Eph. 1:3-6). Don't let anyone tell you different. You are loved and wanted by God.

What areas in your life do you need to take captive and believe the truth of God what says?



supremacy of Christ. Then he returns in verse 21 to the subject of what Jesus did for believers through His death. They had been alienated from God. They were far from God, separated and estranged. They weren't just ignorant of God. Theirs was open rebellion characterized by thoughts hostile toward God which resulted in sinful actions.

Jesus rescued the Colossians from their destructive rebellion. By His death on the cross, Jesus had reconciled them to God by paying the penalty for the sin that kept them apart. The phrase "by is physical body" is important. The false teachers influencing the Colossian believers taught that Jesus was just a spirit. The truth that He is both fully human and fully divine is crucial. Only someone who was human could take our place on the cross. And only the sinless Son of God was worthy to pay the penalty for our sin.

Believers will not reach perfection in this life. We can be faultless and blameless only because Jesus provides forgiveness of sin to those who trust Him. But it's God's purpose to move us toward holiness during this life, transforming us to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). This can only happen if we persevere in faith.

The idea of staying the course appears repeatedly in the New Testament (Matt. 10:22; John 16:1; 2 Thess. 2:15; Heb. 3:12-14; 10:23,35-39). We're not talking about believers losing their salvation. The Bible teaches that true believers are secure in their salvation (John 10:28-29; Rom. 8:38-39;

1 Cor. 1:8; Phil. 1:6). Perseverance doesn't earn salvation, but it does give evidence of it. Believers can become complacent about spiritual things; we can be misled by false teachings; and we can become trapped in sin. Developing a firm foundation in our faith can help growing Christians avoid these mistakes.

WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL WAYS WE CAN ENCOURAGE SOMEONE WHO IS STRUGGLING IN THEIR FAITH?

We Need Others to Strive with Us // Colossians 1:24-29

Paul made it clear in verses 24-29 that he took responsibility for the spiritual development of his readers, and his end goal was to present them to Christ as fully mature followers. Paul never stopped growing spiritually himself. Near the end of his life, Paul still wanted to know Christ and become like Him. As death drew near, Paul was still reaching for that goal (Phil. 1:10-14). But Paul had come a very long way toward that target. Because he had invested in his own growth, he was able to help others progress toward maturity. And he made it his aim to bring others to maturity in Christ while he continued developing himself.

Paul penned his letter to the Colossians while imprisoned in Rome (4:3,10,18). Despite his circumstances, he welcomed the opportunity to suffer because he viewed it as benefitting the church, including his readers in Colossae. Indeed, Paul made the most of his confinement by using the time to write letters like this one. Paul's mention of completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions doesn't mean Jesus's suffering for our salvation wasn't effective or complete. It most certainly was. Paul identified with Christ in his suffering (Phil. 3:10). The suffering he accepted as necessary for the spread of the gospel was a continuation of the suffering Jesus endured throughout His ministry on earth.

Anything he had to endure for teaching and preaching the gospel Paul considered part of the job. His calling was clear. God had entrusted him with the task of making His message fully known. Paul answered that call by preaching far and wide.

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But more to the point, he answered that call by teaching the whole plan of God for salvation that included the death and resurrection of Jesus.

This was the “mystery” long hidden but finally revealed with Jesus’s arrival. From before the fall of man to the death of His Son, God had been working out His plan to redeem His children. At last, that plan was revealed. It included salvation for both Jews and Gentiles, joined together in God’s family. This mystery now revealed included the amazing truth that God had come to dwell within believers through His Son, assuring them of eternal life with Him.

Because Paul had experienced the transforming power of the gospel, it was the subject of every lesson he taught, every sermon he preached. It was all for the purpose of producing fully devoted followers of Christ. He understood salvation is both an event and a process. His determination to help others grow in faith sets the bar high for all of us who make up the church. We, too, should help others become all Christ intended them to be, and then present them to God.

WHAT ARE SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF A MATURE BELIEVER?

DID YOU KNOW?

Christ is **Omnipotent**. Omni means “all” and potent mean “powerful. “This basic definition does not communicate correctly God’s power. According to Wayne Grudem, “Omnipotence is the doctrine that God is able to do all his holy will” (1249). Which means that God cannot do anything with His power that violates His holiness or will. Christ is also **Omniscient**. This teaching in the Bible communicates, according to Grudem, “that God fully knows himself and all things actual and possible in one simple and eternal act” (1249).⁸ Christ demonstrated this when He knew the hearts of the Pharisees and scribes (Mark 2:8). Peter proclaimed this fact when he said, “Lord, You know all things” (John 21:17). As humans we are limited in what we can do and know, but Christians have access to an all powerful and all-knowing God who will do what is right.

Biblical Truth: There is nothing in our lives that will be beyond Christ’s knowledge and power.

How does being loved by the all-knowing and all-powerful God bring you comfort?

LIVE IT

How will you respond to God’s Word?

We need to help new believers to grow. However, we can’t teach them if we are not people of integrity. We do better at instructing others once we have overcome certain situations with the help of the Lord. Our transformed life is a testimony to others. It is the greatest testimony we can share. We need to live the life we sing about. How are you helping others to mature in Christ? Use the steps below as a guide to encourage and help others grow in Christ.

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- **Evaluate.** Assess your own spiritual growth. Take a sheet and write down areas to improve. Pray that God will help you grow closer to Him.
- **Model.** Pray that God will lead you to a young adult in your church. Plan to connect with that person. Use this time to pour into them words that will encourage their growth.
- **Lead.** Use your time to help volunteer to lead a small group in your church. It could also mean that you assist someone who is already leading a group.

DAILY READINGS

1. GOT QUESTIONS? // JOHN 5:1-9; JOHN 13:17-20

Someone once said, "Never ask a question unless the answer makes a difference." Jesus asked a lot of questions during His earthly life. He knew the response would make an eternal difference. One estimate says He asked over three hundred questions in the Gospels but only answered eight. His questioning wasn't for Him, but for the listener to ponder, to examine their motives, clarify their priorities. He asked the crippled man at the pool of Bethesda, 'Do you want to get well?' After He washed the disciples' feet He asked, 'Do you know what I have done for you?' Jesus questions us, too. Questions designed to challenge our faith, uncover our secrets, and expose our fears.

What question has He asked you today? What has His question revealed?

2. STINKING THINKING // 2 CHRONICLES 17:1-6

King Jehoshaphat walked in the ways of David and the Lord was with him. In verse 6 it reads, "His mind rejoiced in the LORD's ways . . ." (HCSB). Don't we want our minds to rejoice in the Lord's ways? We are commanded to love God with all our minds. But because sin has corrupted both our minds and our wills, our natural leaning is to think like the world thinks. But that is stinking thinking. We need God's Word to renew our minds. When we meditate on it, memorize it, study it, and apply it, our mind will begin to dwell on what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and commendable.

Our minds must be renewed daily in the word of God. Think about what you think about.

3. WE'VE BEEN WARNED // I JOHN 2:3-6;15-17

Every day I remind my students of our classroom expectations; how to enter, line up, etc. Then I remind them of the rewards when the expectations are met, and consequences when they are not. Before I mete out the consequences, I warn them. In our text, the Lord is warning us. He expects us love Him. But if we love the world, a system of

values in direct opposition to His values, then His love is not in us. The world's values are wanting what we want, when we want it, how we want it, and wanting others to want what we have. But, if those are our values, we don't love Him.

The love of God is made complete in us and evidenced in our actions.

4. SHINE, JESUS, SHINE // PHILIPPIANS 2:12-15; I JOHN 1:7

When we are walking in obedience, the light of Jesus shines in us. This light points others to God by displaying His faithful love, and generous provision. When we are loving, serving, and caring for others in words and deeds, His light is shining. When we choose not to jump on the complaining train at work, His light is shining. When we choose to let our silence speak for us, His light is shining. When we choose to love our enemy and pray for those who mistreat us, His light is shining. And when we walk in the light, as Jesus Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.

His light is magnified in us and shines so brilliantly that the darkness flees.

5. 'EYES UP' // HEBREWS 12:1-2

In June 2023, the Sooners Women's Softball team won their 7th Women's College World Series Championship. It was their third consecutive national victory. In an interview with ESPN, three young ladies from the team unapologetically proclaimed that Jesus is their source of joy and endurance. One member shared that their past wins had not brought her the satisfaction that she thought it would. But turning to God brought joy to her life. They even have a saying on their team. With their eyes looking up, and index fingers pointing to the sky, they say, "Eyes Up." This signal encourages each member to fix their eyes on Jesus. We may have natural abilities, but without Jesus, we are powerless.

Jesus empowers us to run our race with patience and perseverance.